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English Literature Series

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SILAS MARNER



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TORONTO

Silas Marner

By
George Eliot

Abridged for Schools by

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“A child, more than all other gifts
That earth can offer to declining man,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.”
WORDSWORTH.

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INTRODUCTION

Silas Marner is a little masterpiece in story-telling. The homely subject treated with such brevity and without any intricacy of incident cannot fail to appeal to the story-lover, though the thoughtful reader will find occasion to pause many times to plumb the depths of the philosophy which lies behind the simple narrative.

The deepest things in life are often the simplest and the great mind is one which sees great things simply and without confusion. The power to express with simplicity the great and deep things of life belongs primarily to the poet, for simplicity of style is the result of "seeing things whole."

In this book George Eliot combines the vision of the poet with the art of the story-teller. Running through the plot and controlling every incident is a single great and beautiful idea,—what we call a 'universal idea,' for its truth and beauty have been recognised throughout the ages. Wordsworth expresses this idea in the three lines which are made to stand as brief preface. It was uttered long ago by Isaiah, in the simple words: "And a little child shall lead them." It was borne afresh upon the imagination of George Eliot when she looked back over forty years to the scenes and associations of her childhood.

In a letter dated January, 1861, she says: "I am writing a story which came across my other plans by a sudden inspiration. . . . It is a story of old-fashioned village life which has unfolded itself from the merest millet-seed of thought. . . . It came upon me quite suddenly as a sort of legendary tale suggested by my recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen-weaver with a bag on his back."

This 'millet-seed of thought' developed into a sudden and unaccountable growth spreading its roots far back among the scenes and circumstances of the writer's early life. These early associations constitute the setting and account for the atmosphere of the story of the "Weaver of Raveloe."

Mary Ann Evans, known to the reading public as 'George Eliot,' passed the first twenty-one years of her life (till March, 1841) at Griff House, an old red brick dwelling with farm buildings attached, on the Arbury Estate near Chilvers Coton and Nuneaton in Warwickshire. She left school at fifteen, and at seventeen was already keeping her father's house. When her brother Isaac married in 1841 and took over the old home, Mr. Evans and his daughter moved to Foleshill Row quite near to Coventry, and there they lived together until the father's much lamented death in 1849.

During these years at Foleshill Row there grew up a close intimacy between Miss Evans and the family of Charles Bray, whose circle of literary friends opened up for the shy and diffident girl some of those wider spheres of thought to which she was one day to make her notable contribution. After her father's death she joined the Brays in a visit to the Continent, and on her return to England in March, 1850, she made her home with them until the summer of 1851. Another and longer period of travel followed, when she threw in her life and interests with those of George Henry Lewes, the editor of the *Leader*. In conjunction with him she finally settled in London, and worked hard at reviews and translations until about 1856, when she one day read aloud a description she had once written of life in a Staffordshire farmhouse. Lewes, with quick perception, urged his friend to follow up this line of work and try her hand at a novel. The result was, first, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, published periodically between September, 1856, and October, 1857, followed immediately by *Adam Bede*, which was completed by the end of 1858.

Adam Bede at once made a profound impression upon the reading public, and established 'George Eliot' in the front rank of the novelists of her time. Then followed *The Mill on the Floss*, published in parts between October, 1859, and March, 1860,

and *Silas Marner* in 1861—all written in or near London, which was George Eliot's chief home between 1854 and her death in 1880.

These stories of English home life and character form a group apart, and reveal, more than any of the later works, the peculiar power and deep-rooted interests which had been developing in the writer's mind during these years of change; or in spite of subsequent travels amid more romantic scenes, and long sojournings in London with the most intimate friends of her later life, Griff and the surrounding country remained the home of George Eliot's imagination. The typical English scenery described in these three books is indeed a "lived actuality"; for the writer pictures this quiet rural midland district as she knew it, before it became spoilt by the smoke of mines and the passage of coal trains.

From the windows of Griff House might be seen some of the great trees that once formed part of Shakespeare's forest of Arden; and just as that association lingered long after Warwickshire had ceased to be exactly the place that Shakespeare knew, so did the old traditions of country life and work linger on in the villages of George Eliot's day long after new ideas and new modes of living had established themselves in the towns. Handloom-weaving persisted in the villages for years after the power-loom had come into use elsewhere. Especially was this so in the case of linen-weaving, for the raw flax requires a more intricate and expensive preparation for the machine than for the hand. For this reason linen has become a luxury rather than a necessity, though it is still eagerly sought after by those who can afford to buy it. In the early years of last century a linen-weaver, dexterously working at his hand-loom in one of the outlying villages of a prosperous agricultural district, might be sure of finding a market for his handsome rolls of linen among the wealthy housewives of the countryside. Griff was in the centre of such a district—a district not unlike Raveloe in "its orchards looking lazy with neglected plenty, . . . homesteads where men supped heavily and slept in the light of the evening hearth, and where women seemed to be laying up a stock of linen for the life to come." It was a little less remote, perhaps, for the Birmingham

stage coach passed through each day, thus establishing one link with the outside world.

Little wonder that superstitious beliefs lingered on in the villages, and that a stray linen-weaver with pale face and bent back, setting up his loom in some remote but fertile corner of this rustic England, should be looked upon as an "alien," whose strange skill and unusual manner of life betokened some connection with the "Evil One" !

As a girl George Eliot made the most of her slender educational opportunities ; but it was not until she had moved beyond the narrow circle of her childhood and had developed a wider culture and a deeper experience that she was able to take a broadly intelligent view of some of the incidents of her early life. The significance of events frequently came to her after the lapse of many years. In one of her moods of loving reminiscence she recalled the picture of the linen-weaver, bent under his heavy load, and with the memory came all the feeling of strangeness she had when she saw him as a child. But now there was also the deep discernment which saw in the pallid, undersized, alien-looking man, a human being with a tale to tell of early hopes, simple joys, thwarted ambition and ruined faith, which gradually thrust him out of reach of the sweet refreshment of human intercourse, leaving him the unquestioning slave of material circumstance. All her sympathy went out to this chained wreck of humanity. Her penetrating thought and quick imagination read a life-history into the dull stare and hopeless gait, while her woman's instinct sought a means of setting free the pent-up life-forces, and of recreating a full-bodied spirit out of what had been the mere empty shell of a man.

"In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction : a hand is put into theirs which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward : and the hand may be a little child's."

Even so was the story of the weaver of Raveloe conceived. Unlike the preceding novels, *Silas Marner* was published in one part as befitted the unity of its design.

INTRODUCTION

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The simple story is told with such unaffected skill, and the characters—selected with unerring judgment to represent a particular phase of English life and thought—are drawn with such truth to universal human nature, that the book lays just claim to a place among the masterpieces of the world.

M. C.

SILAS MARNER

PART I

CHAPTER I

IN the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses—and even great ladies, clothed in silk and thread-lace, had their toy spinning-wheels of polished oak—there might be seen in districts far away among the lanes, or deep in the bosom of the hills, certain pallid undersized men, who by the side of the brawny country-folk looked like the remnants of a disinherited race. The shepherd's dog barked fiercely when one of these alien-looking men appeared on the upland dark against the early winter sunset; for what dog likes a figure bent under a heavy bag?—and these pale men 10 rarely stirred abroad without that mysterious burden. The shepherd himself, though he had good reason to believe that the bag held nothing but flaxen thread, or else the long rolls of strong linen spun from that thread, was not quite sure that this trade of weaving, indispensable though it was, could be carried on entirely without the help of the Evil One. In that far-off time superstition clung easily round every person or thing that was at all unwonted, or even intermittent and occasional merely, like the visits of the peddler or the knife-grinder. No one knew where wandering men had their 20 homes or their origin; and how was a man to be explained unless you at least knew somebody who knew his father and mother?

All cleverness, whether in the rapid use of that difficult instrument the tongue, or in some other art unfamiliar to villagers, was in itself suspicious; and the process by which

rapidity and dexterity of any kind were acquired was so wholly hidden that they partook of the nature of conjuring. In this way it came to pass that those scattered linen-weavers—emigrants from the town into the country—were to the last regarded as aliens by their rustic neighbours, and usually contracted the eccentric habits which belong to a state of loneliness.

In the early years of this century such a linen-weaver, named Silas Marner, worked at his vocation in a stone cottage
10 that stood among the nutty hedgerows near the village of Raveloe, and not far from the edge of a deserted stone-pit. The questionable sound of Silas's loom, so unlike the natural cheerful trotting of the winnowing machine, or the simpler rhythm of the flail, had a half-fearful fascination for the Raveloe boys, who would often leave off their nutting or bird's-nesting to peep in at the window of the stone cottage. Sometimes it happened that Marner, pausing to adjust an irregularity in his thread, became aware of the small scoundrels; and though chary of his time, he liked their intrusion so
20 ill that he would descend from his loom, and opening the door would fix on them a gaze that was always enough to make them take to their legs in terror. For how was it possible to believe that those large brown protuberant eyes in Silas Marner's pale face really saw nothing very distinctly that was not close to them, and not rather that their dreadful stare could dart cramp, or rickets, or a wry mouth at any boy who happened to be in the rear? They had perhaps heard their fathers and mothers hint that Silas Marner could cure folk's rheumatism if he had a mind, and
30 add, still more darkly, that if you could only speak the devil fair enough, he might save you the cost of the doctor. Such strange lingering echoes of the old demon-worship might perhaps even now be caught by the diligent listener among the gray-haired peasantry.

And Raveloe was a village where many of the old echoes lingered, undrowned by new voices. It was nestled in a

snug well-wooded hollow, quite an hour's journey on horse-back from any turnpike, where it was never reached by the vibrations of the coach-horn or of public opinion. It was an important-looking village, with a fine old church and large churchyard in the heart of it, and two or three large brick-and-stone homesteads, with well-walled orchards and ornamental weather-cocks, standing close upon the road, and lifting more imposing fronts than the rectory, which peeped from among the trees on the other side of the churchyard.

It was fifteen years since Silas Marner had first come to 10 Raveloe; he was then simply a pallid young man, with prominent shortsighted brown eyes, whose appearance would have had nothing strange for people of average culture and experience, but for the villagers near whom he had come to settle it had mysterious peculiarities which corresponded with the exceptional nature of his occupation, and his advent from an unknown region called "North'ard." So had his way of life. He invited no comer to step across his door-sill, and he never strolled into the village to drink a pint at the Rainbow, or to gossip at the wheelwright's. He sought no 20 man or woman save for the purposes of his calling, or in order to supply himself with the necessities; and it was soon clear to the Raveloe lasses that he would never urge one of them to accept him against her will—quite as if he had heard them declare that they would never marry a dead man come to life again. This view of Marner's personality was not without another ground than his pale face and unexampled eyes; for Jem Rodney, the molecatcher, averred that one evening as he was returning homeward he saw Silas Marner leaning against a stile with a heavy bag on his back, instead of 30 resting the bag on the stile as a man in his senses would have done; and that on coming up to him he saw that Marner's eyes were set like a dead man's, and he spoke to him and shook him, and his limbs were stiff, and his hands clutched the bag as if they'd been made of iron; but just as he had made up his mind that the weaver was dead, he came all right

again, like, as you may say, in the winking of an eye, and said, "Good-night," and walked off. All this Jem swore he had seen, more by token that it was the very day he had been molecatching on Squire Cass's land down by the old sawpit. Some said Marner must have been in a "fit"—a word which seemed to explain things otherwise incredible; but the argumentative Mr. Macey, clerk of the parish, shook his head, and asked if anybody was ever known to go off in a fit and not fall down. A fit was a stroke, wasn't it? and it was in the nature of a stroke to partly take away the use of a man's limbs and throw him on the parish, if he'd got no children to look to. No, no; it was no stroke that would let a man stand on his legs, like a horse between the shafts, and then walk off as soon as you can say "Gee!" But there might be such a thing as a man's soul being loose from his body, and going out and in, like a bird out of its nest and back; and that was how folks got over-wise, for they went to school in this shell-less state to those who could teach them more than their neighbours could learn with their five senses and the parson. And where did Master Marner get his knowledge of herbs from—and charms too, if he liked to give them away? Jem Rodney's story was no more than what might have been expected by anybody who had seen how Marner had cured Sally Oates, and made her sleep like a baby, when her heart had been beating enough to burst her body for two months and more, while she had been under the doctor's care. He might cure more folks if he would; but he was worth speaking fair, if it was only to keep him from doing you a mischief.

30 The years had rolled on without producing any change in the impressions of the neighbours concerning Marner, except the change from novelty to habit. At the end of fifteen years the Raveloe men said just the same things about Silas Marner as at the beginning. They did not say them quite so often, but they believed them much more strongly when they did say them. There was only one

important addition which the years had brought ; it was that Master Marner had laid by a fine sight of money somewhere, and that he could buy up " bigger men " than himself. / But Marner's life before he came to Raveloe had been filled with movement, mental activity, and close fellowship. He was highly thought of in that little hidden world known to itself as the church assembling in Lantern Yard. He was believed to be a young man of exemplary life and ardent faith ; and a peculiar interest had been centred in him ever since he had fallen at a prayer-meeting into a mysterious 10 rigidity and suspension of consciousness which, lasting for an hour or more, had been mistaken for death. Silas was evidently a brother selected for a peculiar discipline. He had inherited from his mother some acquaintance with medicinal herbs and their preparation—a little store of wisdom which she had imparted to him as a solemn bequest—but of late years he had had doubts about the lawfulness of applying this knowledge, so that his inherited delight to wander through the fields in search of foxglove and dandelion and coltsfoot began to wear to him the character of a temptation. 20

Among the members of his church there was one young man, a little older than himself, with whom he had long lived in such close friendship that it was the custom of their Lantern Yard brethren to call them David and Jonathan. The real name of the friend was William Dane, and he too was regarded as a shining instance of youthful piety, though somewhat given to over-severity towards weaker brethren, and to be so dazzled by his own light as to hold himself wiser than his teachers. But whatever blemishes others might discern in William, to his friend's mind he was faultless ; 30 for Marner had one of those impressible self-doubting natures which at an inexperienced age admire imperativeness and lean on contradiction. The expression of trusting simplicity in Marner's face, heightened by that absence of special observation, that defenceless, deerlike gaze which belongs to large prominent eyes, was strongly contrasted by the

self-complacent suppression of inward triumph that lurked in the narrow slanting eyes and compressed lips of William Dane.

It had seemed to the unsuspecting Silas that the friendship had suffered no chill even from his formation of another attachment of a closer kind. For some months he had been engaged to a young servant-woman, waiting only for a little increase to their mutual savings in order to their marriage ; and it was a great delight to him that Sarah did not object
10 to William's occasional presence in their Sunday interviews. It was at this point in their history that Silas's cataleptic fit occurred during the prayer-meeting ; and amidst the various queries and expressions of interest addressed to him by his fellow-members, William's suggestion alone jarred with the general sympathy towards a brother thus singled out for special dealings. He observed that to him this trance looked more like a visitation of Satan than a proof of divine favour, and exhorted his friend to see that he hid no accursed thing within his soul. Silas, feeling bound to
20 accept rebuke and admonition as a brotherly office, felt no resentment but only pain at his friend's doubts concerning him ; and to this was soon added some anxiety at the perception that Sarah's manner towards him began to exhibit a strange fluctuation between an effort at an increased manifestation of regard and involuntary signs of shrinking and dislike. He asked her if she wished to break off their engagement ; but she denied this. Their engagement was known to the church, and had been recognized in the prayer-meetings ; it could not be broken off without strict investigation, and
30 Sarah could render no reason that would be sanctioned by the feeling of the community. At this time the senior deacon was taken dangerously ill, and, being a childless widower, he was tended night and day by some of the younger brethren or sisters. Silas frequently took his turn in the night-watching with William, the one relieving the other at two in the morning. The old man, contrary to expectation, seemed to be on the

way to recovery, when one night Silas, sitting up by his bedside, observed that his usual audible breathing had ceased. The candle was burning low, and he had to lift it to see the patient's face distinctly. Examination convinced him that the deacon was dead—had been dead some time, for the limbs were rigid. Silas asked himself if he had been asleep, and looked at the clock. It was already four in the morning. How was it that William had not come? In much anxiety he went to seek for help, and soon there were several friends assembled in the house, the minister among them, while 10 Silas went away to his work, wishing he could have met William, to know the reason of his non-appearance. But at six o'clock, as he was thinking of going to seek his friend, William came, and with him the minister. They came to summon him to Lantern Yard, to meet the church members there; and to his inquiry concerning the cause of the summons the only reply was, "You will hear." Nothing further was said until Silas was seated in the vestry, in front of the minister, with the eyes of those who to him represented God's people fixed solemnly upon him. Then the minister, 20 taking out a pocket-knife, showed it to Silas, and asked him if he knew where he had left that knife. Silas said he did not know that he had left it anywhere out of his own pocket, but he was trembling at this strange interrogation. He was then exhorted not to hide his sin, but to confess and repent. The knife had been found in the bureau by the departed deacon's bedside—found in the place where the little bag of church money had lain, which the minister himself had seen the day before. Some hand had removed that bag; and whose hand could it be, if not that of the 30 man to whom the knife belonged? For some time Silas was mute with astonishment; then he said, "God will clear me; I know nothing about the knife being there, or the money being gone. Search me and my dwelling; you will find nothing but three pound five of my own savings, which William Dane knows I have had these six months." At

this William groaned, but the minister said, "The proof is heavy against you, brother Marner. The money was taken in the night last past, and no man was with our departed brother but you, for William Dane declares to us that he was hindered by sudden sickness from going to take his place as usual, and you yourself said that he had not come; and, moreover, you neglected the dead body."

"I must have slept," said Silas. Then after a pause he added, "Or I must have had another visitation like that
10 which you have all seen me under, so that the thief must have come and gone while I was not in the body, but out of the body. But I say again, search me and my dwelling, for I have been nowhere else."

The search was made, and it ended in William Dane's finding the well-known bag, empty, tucked behind the chest of drawers in Silas's chamber. On this William exhorted his friend to confess, and not to hide his sin any longer. Silas turned a look of keen reproach on him, and said, "William, for nine years that we have gone in and out together, have
20 you ever known me tell a lie? But God will clear me."

"Brother," said William, "how do I know what you may have done in the secret chambers of your heart, to give Satan an advantage over you?"

Silas was still looking at his friend. Suddenly a deep flush came over his face, and he was about to speak impetuously, when he seemed checked again by some inward shock, that sent the flush back and made him tremble. But at last he spoke feebly, looking at William.

"I remember now: the knife wasn't in my pocket."
30 William said, "I know nothing of what you mean." The other persons present, however, began to inquire where Silas meant to say that the knife was, but he would give no further explanation. He only said, "I am sore stricken; I can say nothing. God will clear me."

On their return to the vestry there was further deliberation. Any resort to legal measures for ascertaining the culprit was

contrary to the principles of the church in Lantern Yard, according to which prosecution was forbidden to Christians, even had the case held less scandal to the community. But the members were bound to take other measures for finding out the truth, and they resolved on praying and drawing lots. This resolution can be a ground of surprise only to those who are unacquainted with that obscure religious life which has gone on in the alleys of our town. Silas knelt with his brethren, relying on his own innocence being certified by immediate divine interference, but feeling that there was 10 sorrow and mourning behind for him even when—that his trust in man had been cruelly bruised. *The lots declared that Silas Marner was guilty.* He was solemnly suspended from church membership, and called upon to render up the stolen money; only on confession, as the sign of repentance, could he be received once more within the folds of the church. Marner listened in silence. At last, when every one rose to depart, he went towards William Darc and said in a voice shaken by agitation,—

“The last time I remember using my knife was when I 20 took it out to cut a strap for you. I don’t remember putting it in my pocket again. *You* stole the money, and you have woven a plot to lay the sin at my door. But you may prosper, for all that. There is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent.”

There was a general shudder at this blasphemy.

William said meekly, “I leave our brethren to judge whether this is the voice of Satan or not. I can do nothing but pray for you, Silas.”

30

Poor Marner went out with that despair in his soul—that shaken trust in God and man which is little short of madness to a loving nature. In the bitterness of his wounded spirit he said to himself, “*She* will cast me off too.” And he reflected that, if she did not believe the testimony against him, her whole faith must be upset as his was.

Marner went home, and for a whole day sat alone, stunned by despair, without any impulse to go to Sarah and attempt to win her belief in his innocence. The second day he took refuge from benumbing unbelief by getting into his loom and working away as usual; and before many hours were past, the minister and one of the deacons came to him with the message from Sarah that she held her engagement to him at an end. Silas received the message mutely, and then turned away from the messenger to work at his loom again. In little more than a month from that time Sarah was married to William Dane; and not long afterwards it was known to the brethren in Lantern Yard that Silas Marner had departed from the town.

CHAPTER II

It is not easy to imagine what was the effect on a simple weaver like Silas Marner when he left his own country and people and came to settle in Raveloe. Nothing could be more unlike his native town, set within sight of the widespread hillsides, than this low, wooded region, where he felt hidden even from the heavens by the screening trees and hedgerows.

20 There was nothing here, when he rose in the deep morning quiet and looked out on the dewy brambles and rank tufted grass, that seemed to have any relation with that life contriving in Lantern Yard, which had once been to him the altar-place of high dispensations. The whitewashed walls; the little pews where well-known figures entered with a subdued rustling; the pulpit where the minister delivered unquestioned doctrine, and swayed to and fro, and handled the book in a long-accustomed manner; the very pauses between the couplets of the hymn as it was given out, and the recurrent

30 swell of voices in song;—these things had been the channel of divine influences to Marner.

And what could be more unlike that Lantern Yard world

than the world in Raveloe?—orchards looking lazy with neglected plenty; the large church in the wide churchyard, which men gazed at lounging at their own doors in service-time; the purple-faced farmers jogging along the lanes or turning in at the Rainbow; homesteads, where men supped heavily and slept in the light of the evening hearth, and where women seemed to be laying up a stock of linen for the life to come. There were no lips in Raveloe from which a word could fall that would stir Silas Marner's benumbed faith to a sense of pain. It seemed to him that the Power he had 10 vainly trusted in among the streets and at the prayer-meetings was very far away from this land in which he had taken refuge, where men lived in careless abundance knowing and needing nothing of that trust which for him had been turned to bitterness.

His first movement after the shock had been to work in his loom; and he went on with this unremittingly, never asking himself why, now he was come to Raveloe, he worked far on into the night to finish the tale of Mrs. Osgood's table-linen sooner than she expected, without contemplating 20 beforehand the money she would put into his hand for the work. He seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse, without reflection. Silas's hand satisfied itself with throwing the shuttle, and his eye with seeing the little squares in the cloth complete themselves under his effort. Then there were the calls of hunger; and Silas in his solitude had to provide his own breakfast, dinner, and supper, to fetch his own water from the well, and put his own kettle on the fire; and all these immediate promptings helped, along with the weaving, to reduce his life to the unquestioning 30 activity of a spinning insect. He hated the thought of the past; there was nothing that called out his love and fellowship toward the strangers he had come amongst; and the future was all dark, for there was no Unseen Love that cared for him.

But at last Mrs. Osgood's table-linen was finished, and Silas was paid in gold. His earnings in his native town,

where he worked for a wholesale dealer, had been after a lower rate; he had been paid weekly, and of his weekly earnings a large proportion had gone to objects of piety and charity. Now, for the first time in his life, he had five bright guineas put into his hand. No man expected a share of them, and he loved no man that he should offer him a share. But what were the guineas to him who saw no vista beyond countless days of weaving? It was needless for him to ask that, for it was pleasant to him to feel them in his palm, 10 and look at their bright faces, which were all his own; it was another element of life, like the weaving and the satisfaction of hunger, subsisting quite aloof from the life of belief and love from which he had been cut off. The weaver's hand had known the touch of hard-won money even before the palm had grown to its full breadth: for twenty years, mysterious money had stood to him as the symbol of earthly good, and the immediate object of toil. He had seemed to love it little in the years when every penny had its purpose for him; for he loved the *purpose* then. But now, when all 20 purpose was gone, that habit of looking towards the money and grasping it with a sense of fulfilled effort made a loam that was deep enough for the seeds of desire; and as Silas walked homeward across the fields in the twilight, he drew out the money and thought it was brighter in the gathering gloom.

Gradually the guineas, the crowns, and the half-crowns grew to a heap, and Marnier drew less and less for his own wants, trying to solve the problem of keeping himself strong enough to work sixteen hours a day on as small an outlay 30 as possible. Marnier wanted the heaps of ten to grow into a square, and then into a larger square; and every added guinea, while it was itself a satisfaction, bred a new desire. He began to think the money was conscious of him, as his loom was; and he would on no account have exchanged those coins, which had become his familiars, for other coins with unknown faces. He handled them, he counted them,

till their form and colour were like the satisfaction of a thirst to him ; but it was only in the night, when his work was done, that he drew them out to enjoy their companionship. He had taken up some bricks in his floor underneath his loom, and here he had made a hole in which he set the iron pot that contained his guineas and silver coins, covering the bricks with sand whenever he replaced them. Not that the idea of being robbed presented itself often or strongly to his mind : hoarding was common in country districts in those days ; there were old labourers in the parish of Raveloe 10 who were known to have their savings by them, probably inside their flock-beds ; but their rustic neighbours, though not all of them as honest as their ancestors in the days of King Alfred, had not imaginations bold enough to lay a plan of burglary. How could they have spent the money in their own village without betraying themselves ? They would be obliged to “run away”—a course as dark and dubious as a balloon journey.

So, year after year, Silas Marner had lived in this solitude, his guineas rising in the iron pot, and his life narrowing and 20 hardening itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction that had no relation to any other being. His life had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and hoarding. The prominent eyes that used to look trusting and dreamy, now looked as if they had been made to see only one kind of thing that was very small, like tiny grain, for which they hunted everywhere ; and he was so withered and yellow that, although he was not yet forty, the children always called him “Old Master Marner.”

Yet even in this stage of withering a little incident happened 30 which showed that the sap of affection was not all gone. It was one of his daily tasks to fetch his water from a well a couple of fields off, and for this purpose, ever since he came to Raveloe, he had had a brown earthenware pot, which he held as his most precious utensil among the very few conveniences he had granted himself. It had been his

companion for twelve years, always standing on the same spot, always lending its handle to him in the early morning, so that its form had an expression for him of willing helpfulness, and the impress of its handle on his palm gave a satisfaction mingled with that of having the fresh clear water. One day as he was returning from the well he stumbled against the step of the stile, and his brown pot, falling with force against the stones that overarched the ditch below him, was broken in three pieces. Silas picked up the pieces
10 and carried them home with grief in his heart. The brown pot could never be of use to him any more, but he stuck the bits together and propped the ruin in its old place for a memorial.

This is the history of Silas Marner, until the fifteenth year after he came to Raveloe. The livelong day he sat in his loom, his ear filled with its monotony, his eyes bent close down on the slow growth of sameness in the brownish web, his muscles moving with such even repetition that their pause seemed almost as much a constraint as the holding of his
20 breath. But at night came his revelry ; at night he closed his shutters, and made fast his doors, and drew forth his gold. Long ago the heap of coins had become too large for the iron pot to hold them, and he had made for them two thick leather bags, which wasted no room in their resting-place, but lent themselves flexibly to every corner. How the guineas shone as they came pouring out of the dark leather mouths ! The silver bore no large proportion in amount to the gold, because the long pieces of linen which formed his chief work were always partly paid for in gold,
30 and out of the silver he supplied his own bodily wants, choosing always the shillings and sixpences to spend in this way. He loved the guineas best, but he would not change the silver—the crowns and half-crowns that were his own earnings, begotten by his labour ; he loved them all. He spread them out in heaps and bathed his hands in them ; then he counted them and set them up in regular piles, and

felt their rounded outline between his thumb and fingers, and thought fondly of the guineas that were only half earned by the work in his loom, as if they had been unborn children—thought of the guineas that were coming slowly through the coming years, through all his life, which spread far away before him, the end quite hidden by countless days of weaving. No wonder his thoughts were still with his loom and his money when he made his journeys through the fields and the lanes to fetch and carry home his work, so that his steps never wandered to the hedge-banks and the lane-side in search of 10 the once familiar herbs. These too belonged to the past, from which his life had shrunk away, like a ruyet that has sunk far down from the grassy fringe of its old breadth into a little shivering thread, that cuts a groove for itself in the barren sand.

But about the Christmas of that fifteenth year a second great change came over Marner's life, and his history became blent in a singular manner with the life of his neighbours.

CHAPTER III

THE greatest man in Raveloe was Squire Cass, who lived in the large red house with the handsome flight of stone steps 20 in front and the high stables behind it, nearly opposite the church. He was only one among several landed parishioners, but he alone was honoured with the title of Squire.

The Squire's wife had died long ago, and the Red House was without that presence of the wife and mother which is the fountain of wholesome love and fear in parlour and kitchen; and this helped to account not only for there being more profusion than finished excellence in the holiday provisions, but also for the frequency with which the proud Squire condescended to preside in the parlour of the Rainbow 30 rather than under the shadow of his own dark wainscot; perhaps, also, for the fact that his sons had turned out rather

ill. Raveloe was not a place where moral censure was severe, but it was thought a weakness in the Squire that, he had kept all his sons at home in idleness ; and though some licence was to be allowed to young men whose fathers could afford it, people shook their heads at the courses of the second son, Dunstan, commonly called Dunsey Cass, whose taste for swopping and betting might turn out to be a sowing of something worse than wild oats. To be sure, the neighbours said it was no matter what became of Dunsey—a spiteful, 10 jeering fellow, who seemed to enjoy his drink the more when other people went dry—always provided that his doings did not bring trouble on a family like Squire Cass’s, with a monument in the church and tankards older than King George. But it would be a thousand pities if Mr. Godfrey, the eldest, a fine open-faced, good-natured young man who was to come into the land some day, should take to going along the same road with his brother, as he had seemed to do of late. If he went on in that way, he would lose Miss Nancy Lammeter ; for it was well known that she had looked 20 very shyly on him ever since last Whitsuntide twelvemonth, when there was so much talk about his being away from home days and days together. There was something wrong, more than common—that was quite clear ; for Mr. Godfrey didn’t look half so fresh-coloured and open as he used to do. At one time everybody was saying, What a handsome couple he and Miss Nancy Lammeter would make ! and if she could come to be mistress at the Red House there would be a fine change, for the Lammeters had been brought up in that way that they never suffered a pinch of salt to be wasted, and 30 yet everybody in their household had of the best, according to his place. Such a daughter-in-law would be a saving to the old Squire, if she never brought a penny to her fortune ; for it was to be feared that, notwithstanding his incomings, there were more holes in his pocket than the one where he put his own hand in. But if Mr. Godfrey didn’t turn over a new leaf, he might say good-bye to Miss Nancy Lammeter.

It was the once hopeful Godfrey who was standing, with his hands in his side pockets and his back to the fire, in the dark wainscoted parlour, one late November afternoon in that fifteenth year of Silas Marner's life at Raveloe. The fading gray light fell dimly on the walls, decorated with guns, whips, and foxes' brushes; on coats and hats flung on the chairs, on tankards sending forth a scent of flat ale, and on a half-choked fire, with pipes propped up in the chimney-corners—signs of a domestic life destitute of any hallowing charm, with which the look of gloomy vexation 10 on Godfrey's blond face was in sad accord. He seemed to be waiting and listening for some one's approach, and presently the sound of a heavy step, with an accompanying whistle, was heard across the large empty ante-hall.

The door opened, and a thick-set, heavy-looking young man entered, with the flushed face and the gratuitously elated bearing which mark the first stage of intoxication. It was Dunsey, and at the sight of him Godfrey's face parted with some of its gloom to take on the more active expression of hatred. The handsome brown spaniel that lay on the 20 hearth retreated under the chair in the chimney-corner.

"Well, Master Godfrey, what do you want with me?" said Dunsey, in a mocking tone. "You're my elders and betters, you know; I was obliged to come when you sent for me."

"Why, this is what I want—and just shake yourself sober and listen, will you?" said Godfrey savagely. He had himself been drinking more than was good for him, trying to turn his gloom into uncalculating anger. "I want to tell you I must hand over that rent of Fowler's to the Squire, or 30 else tell him I gave it you; for he's threatening to distrain for it, and it'll all be out soon, whether I tell him or not. He said just now, before he went out, he should send word to Cox to distrain if Fowler didn't come and pay up his arrears this week. The Squire's short o' cash, and in no humour to stand any nonsense; and you know what he threatened if

ever he found you making away with his money again. So see and get the money, and pretty quickly, will you ? ”

“ Oh ! ” said Dunsey sneeringly, coming nearer to his brother and looking in his face. “ Suppose, now, you get the money yourself, and save me the trouble, eh ? Since you was so kind as to hand it over to me, you’ll not refuse me the kindness to pay it back for me ; it was your brotherly love made you do it, you know.”

Godfrey bit his lips and clenched his fist. “ Don’t come 10 near me with that look, else I’ll knock you down.”

“ Oh no, you won’t,” said Dunsey, turning away on his heel, however. “ Because I’m such a good-natured brother, you know. I might get you turned out of house and home and cut off with a shilling any day. I might tell the Squire how his handsome son was married to that nice young woman Molly Farren, and was very unhappy because he couldn’t live with his drunken wife, and I should slip into your place as comfortable as could be. But, you see, I don’t do it—I’m so easy and good-natured. You’ll take any trouble for 20 me. You’ll get the hundred pounds for me—I know you will.”

“ How can I get the money ? ” said Godfrey, quivering. “ I haven’t a shilling to bless myself with. And it’s a lie that you’d slip into my place ; you’d get yourself turned out too, that’s all. For if you begin telling tales, I’ll follow. Bob’s my father’s favourite ; you know that very well. He’d only think himself well rid of you.”

“ Never mind,” said Dunsey, nodding his head sideways as he looked out of the window. “ It ’ud be very pleasant to me to go in your company ; you’re such a handsome 30 brother, and we’ve always been so fond of quarrelling with one another, I shouldn’t know what to do without you. But you’d like better for us both to stay at home together ; I know you would. So you’ll manage to get that little sum o’ money, and I’ll bid you good-bye, though I’m sorry to part.”

Dunstan was moving off ; but Godfrey rushed after him and seized him by the arm, saying with an oath,—

"I tell you I have no money; I can get no money."

"Borrow of old Kimble."

"I tell you he won't lend me any more, and I shan't ask him."

"Well, then, sell Wildfire."

"Yes, that's easy talking. I must have the money directly."

"Well, you've only got to ride him to the hunt to-morrow. There'll be Bryce and Keating there, for sure. You'll get more bids than one."

10

"I dare say, and get back home at eight o'clock, splashed up to the chin. I'm going to Mrs. Osgood's birthday dance."

"Oho!" said Dunsey, turning his head on one side, and trying to speak in a small mincing treble. And there's sweet Miss Nancy coming; and we shall dance with her, and promise never to be naughty again, and be taken into favour, and——"

"Hold your tongue about Miss Nancy, you fool," said Godfrey, turning red, "else I'll throttle you."

"What for?" said Dunsey, still in an artificial tone, but 20 taking a whip from the table and beating the butt end of it on his palm. "You've a very good chance. I'd advise you to creep up her sleeve again; it 'ud be saving time if Molly should happen to take a drop too much laudanum some day and make a widower of you. Miss Nancy wouldn't mind being a second, if she didn't know it. And you've got a good-natured brother, who'll keep your secret well, because you'll be so very obliging to him."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Godfrey, quivering and pale again: "my patience is pretty near at an end. If 30 you'd a little more sharpness in you, you might know that you may urge a man a bit too far, and make one leap as easy as another. I don't know but what it is so now. I may as well tell the Squire everything myself. I should get you off my back, if I got nothing else. And after all he'll know some time. She's been threatening to come herself and

tell him. So don't flatter yourself that your secrecy's worth any price you choose to ask. You drain me of money till I have got nothing to pacify *her* with, and she'll do as she threatens some day. It's all one. I'll tell my father everything myself, and you may go to the devil."

Dunsey perceived that he had overshot his mark, and that there was a point at which even the hesitating Godfrey might be driven into decision. But he said with an air of unconcern,—

- 10 "As you please; but I'll have a draught of ale first." And ringing the bell, he threw himself across two chairs, and began to rap the window-seat with the handle of his whip.

Godfrey stood, still with his back to the fire, uneasily moving his fingers among the contents of his side pockets and looking at the floor. That big muscular frame of his held plenty of animal courage, but helped him to no decision when the dangers to be braved were such as could neither be knocked down nor throttled. As he reflected upon what he had just said, the utmost concession to Dunstan about the
20 horse began to seem easy compared with the fulfilment of his own threat. But his pride would not let him recommence the conversation otherwise than by continuing the quarrel. Dunstan was waiting for this, and took his ale in shorter draughts than usual.

- "It's just like you," Godfrey burst out in a bitter tone, "to talk about my selling Wildfire in that cool way—the last thing I've got to call my own, and the best bit of horse-flesh I ever had in my life. And if you'd got a spark of pride in you, you'd be ashamed to see the stables emptied
30 and everybody sneering about it. But it's my belief you'd sell yourself, if it was only for the pleasure of making somebody feel he'd got a bad bargain."

"Ay, ay," said Dunstan, very placably, "you do me justice, I see. You know I'm a jewel for 'ticing people into bargains. For which reason I advise you to let *me* sell Wildfire. I'd ride him to the hunt to-morrow for you with

pleasure. I shouldn't look so handsome as you in the saddle, but it's the horse they'll bid for and not the rider."

"Yes, I dare say—trust my horse to you!"

"As you please," said Dunstan, rapping the window-seat again with an air of great unconcern. "It's *you* have got to pay Fowler's money; it's none of my business. You received the money from him when you went to Bramcote, and *you* told the Squire it wasn't paid. I'd nothing to do with that; you chose to be so obliging as to give it me, that was all. If you don't want to pay the money, let it alone; 10 it's all one to me. But I was willing to accommodate you by undertaking to sell the horse, seeing it's not convenient to you to go so far to-morrow."

Godfrey was silent for some moments. He would have liked to spring on Dunstan, wrench the whip from his hand, and flog him to within an inch of his life, and no bodily fear could have deterred him; but he was mastered by another sort of fear, which was fed by feelings stronger even than his resentment. When he spoke again it was in a half-conciliatory tone.

20

"Well, you mean no nonsense about the horse, eh? You'll sell him all fair, and hand over the money? If you don't, you know, everything 'ull go to smash, for I've got nothing else to trust to. And you'll have less pleasure in pulling the horse over my head when your own skull's to be broken too."

"Ay, ay," said Dunstan, rising; "all right. I thought you'd come round. I'm the fellow to bring old Bryce up to the scratch. I'll get you a hundred and twenty for him, if I get you a penny."

30

"But it'll perhaps rain cats and dogs to-morrow, as it did yesterday, and then you can't go," said Godfrey, hardly knowing whether he wished for that obstacle or not.

"Not *it*," said Dunstan; "I'm always lucky in my weather. It might rain if you wanted to go yourself. You never hold trumps, you know; I always do. You've got the beauty,

you see, and I've got the luck, so you must keep me by you for your crooked sixpence ; you'll *ne-ver* get along without me."

"Confound you, hold your tongue !" said Godfrey impetuously. "And take care to keep sober to-morrow, else you'll get pitched on your head coming home, and Wildfire might be the worse for it."

"Make your tender heart easy," said Dunstan, opening the door. "You never knew me see double when I'd got a
10 bargain to make ; it 'ud spoil the fun. Besides, whenever I fall, I'm warranted to fall on my legs."

With that Dunstan slammed the door behind him, and left Godfrey to that bitter rumination on his personal circumstances which was now unbroken from day to day save by the excitement of sporting, drinking, card-playing, or the rarer and less oblivious pleasure of seeing Miss Nancy Lammeter.

For four years he had thought of Nancy Lammeter, and wooed her with tacit, patient worship as the woman who
20 made him think of the future with joy. She would be his wife, and would make home lovely to him, as his father's home had never been ; and it would be easy, when she was always near, to shake off those foolish habits that were no pleasures, but only a feverish way of annulling vacancy. Godfrey's was an essentially domestic nature, bred up in a home where the hearth had no smiles, and where the daily habits were not chastised by the presence of household order. His easy disposition made him fall in unresistingly with
30 affection, the longing for some influence that would make the good he preferred easy to pursue, caused the neatness, purity, and liberal orderliness of the Lammeter household, sunned by the smile of Nancy, to seem like those fresh bright hours of the morning when temptations go to sleep and leave the ear open to the voice of the good angel, inviting to industry, sobriety, and peace. And yet the hope of this paradise had not

been enough to save him from a course which shut him out of it for ever. Instead of keeping fast hold of the strong silken rope by which Nancy would have drawn him safe to the green banks where it was easy to step firmly, he had let himself be dragged back into mud and slime, in which it was useless to struggle. He had made ties for himself which robbed him of all wholesome motive and were a constant exasperation.

Still, there was one position worse than the present: it was the position he would be in when the ugly secret was 10 disclosed; and the desire that continually triumphed over every other was that of warding off the evil day when he would have to bear the consequences of his father's violent resentment for the wound inflicted on his family pride—would have, perhaps, to turn his back on that hereditary ease and dignity which, after all, was a sort of reason for living, and would carry with him the certainty that he was banished for ever from the sight and esteem of Nancy Lammeter. The longer the interval, the more chance there was of deliverance from some, at least, of the hateful conse- 20 quences to which he had sold himself; the more opportunities remained for him to snatch the strange gratification of seeing Nancy, and gathering some faint indications of her lingering regard. Towards this gratification he was impelled fitfully every now and then, after having passed weeks in which he had avoided her as the far-off bright-winged prize that only made him spring forward and find his chain all the more galling. One of those fits of yearning was on him now, and it would have been strong enough to have persuaded him to trust Wildfire to Dunstan rather than disappoint the 30 yearning, even if he had not had another reason for his disinclination towards the morrow's hunt. That other reason was the fact that the morning's meet was near Batherley, the market-town where the unhappy woman lived whose image became more odious to him every day; and to his thought the whole vicinage was haunted by her. The yoke

a man creates for himself by wrongdoing will breed hate in the kindest nature ; and the good-humoured, affectionate-hearted Godfrey Cass was fast becoming a bitter man, visited by cruel wishes, that seemed to enter and depart and enter again, like demons who had found in him a ready-garnished home.

CHAPTER IV

DUNSTAN CASS, setting off in the raw morning at the judiciously quiet pace of a man who is obliged to ride to cover on his hunter, had to take his way along the lane which, 10 at its farther extremity, passed by the piece of unenclosed ground called the Stone-pit, where stood the cottage, once a stone-cutter's shed, now for fifteen years inhabited by Silas Marner. The spot looked very dreary at this season, with the moist, trodden clay about it, and the red, muddy water high up in the deserted quarry. That was Dunstan's first thought as he approached it ; the second was that the old fool of a weaver, whose loom he heard rattling already, had a great deal of money hidden somewhere. How was it that he, Dunstan Cass, who had often heard talk of Marner's 20 miserliness, had never thought of suggesting to Godfrey that he should frighten or persuade the old fellow into lending the money on the excellent security of the young Squire's prospects ? The resource occurred to him now as so easy and agreeable, especially as Marner's hoard was likely to be large enough to leave Godfrey a handsome surplus beyond his immediate needs, and enable him to accommodate his faithful brother, that he had almost turned the horse's head towards home again. Godfrey would be ready enough to accept the suggestion ; he would snatch eagerly at a 30 plan that might save him from parting with Wildfire. But when Dunstan's meditation reached this point, the inclination, to go on grew strong and prevailed. He didn't want to give Godfrey that pleasure ; he preferred that Master Godfrey

should be vexed. Moreover, Dunstan enjoyed the self-important consciousness of having a horse to sell, and the opportunity of driving a bargain, swaggering and possibly taking somebody in. He might have all the satisfaction attendant on selling his brother's horse, and not the less have the further satisfaction of setting Godfrey to borrow Marner's money. So he rode on to cover.

Bryce and Keating were there, as Dunstan was quite sure they would be—he was such a lucky fellow.

A few minutes' conversation with these two ended in the 10 purchase of the horse by Bryce for a hundred and twenty, to be paid on the delivery of Wildfire safe and sound at the Batherley stables. It did occur to Dunsey that it might be wise for him to give up the day's hunting, proceed at once to Batherley, and, having waited for Bryce's return, hire a horse to carry him home with the money in his pocket. But the inclination for a run, encouraged by confidence in his luck, and by a draught of brandy from his pocket-pistol at the conclusion of the bargain, was not easy to overcome, especially with a horse under him that would take the fences 20 to the admiration of the field. Dunstan, however, took one fence too many, and got his horse pierced with a hedge-stake. Poor Wildfire, unconscious of his price, turned on his flank and painfully panted his last.

It was now nearly four o'clock, and a mist was gathering: the sooner Dunstan got into the road the better. He remembered having crossed the road and seen the finger-post only a little while before Wildfire broke down; so, buttoning his coat, twisting the lash of his hunting-whip compactly round the handle, and rapping the tops of his boots with 30 a self-possessed air, as if to assure himself that he was not at all taken by surprise, he set off with the sense that he was undertaking a remarkable feat of bodily exertion, which somehow and at some time he should be able to dress up and magnify to the admiration of a select circle at the Rainbow. When a young gentleman like Dunsey is reduced to so

exceptional a mode of locomotion as walking, a whip in his hand is a desirable corrective to a too bewildering dreamy sense of unwontedness in his position; and Dunstan, as he went along through the gathering mist, was always rapping his whip somewhere. It was Godfrey's whip, which he had chosen to take without leave because it had a gold handle. Of course no one could see, when Dunstan held it, that the name *Godfrey Cass* was cut in deep letters on that gold handle; they could only see that it was a very handsome 10 whip. Dunsey was not without fear that he might meet some acquaintance in whose eyes he would cut a pitiable figure, for mist is no screen when people get close to each other; but when he at last found himself in the well-known Raveloe lanes without having met a soul, he silently remarked that that was part of his usual good luck. But now the mist, helped by the evening darkness, was more of a screen than he desired, for it hid the ruts into which his feet were liable to slip—hid everything, so that he had to guide his steps by dragging his whip along the low bushes in advance 20 of the hedgerow. He must soon, he thought, be getting near the opening at the Stone-pits; he should find it out by the break in the hedgerow. He found it out, however, by another circumstance which he had not expected—namely, by certain gleams of light, which he presently guessed to proceed from Silas Marner's cottage. That cottage and the money hidden within it had been in his mind continually during his walk, and he had been imagining ways of cajoling and tempting the weaver to part with the immediate possession of his money for the sake of receiving interest.

30 He turned up the bank, not without some fear lest he might miss the right way, since he was not certain whether the light were in front or on the side of the cottage. But he felt the ground before him cautiously with his whip-handle, and at last arrived safely at the door. He knocked loudly, rather enjoying the idea that the old fellow would be frightened at the sudden noise. He heard no movement in

reply ; all was silence in the cottage. Was the weaver gone to bed then ? If so, why had he left a light ? That was a strange forgetfulness in a miser. Dunstan knocked still more loudly, and without pausing for a reply pushed his fingers through the latch-hole, intending to shake the door and pull the latch-string up and down, not doubting that the door was fastened. But, to his surprise, at this double motion the door opened, and he found himself in front of a bright fire, which lit up every corner of the cottage—the bed, the loom, the three chairs, and the table—and showed 10 him that Marner was not there.

Nothing at that moment could be much more inviting to Dunsey than the bright fire on the brick hearth. He walked in and seated himself by it at once. There was something in front of the fire, too, that would have been inviting to a hungry man, if it had been in a different stage of cooking. It was a small bit of pork suspended from the kettle-hanger by a string passed through a large door-key, in a way known to primitive housekeepers unpossessed of jacks. But the pork had been hung at the farthest extremity 20 of the hanger, apparently to prevent the roasting from proceeding too rapidly during the owner's absence. The old staring simpleton had hot meat for his supper, then ? thought Dunstan. People had always said he lived on mouldy bread, on purpose to check his appetite. But where could he be at this time, and on such an evening, leaving his supper in this stage of preparation, and his door unfastened ? Dunstan's own recent difficulty in making his way suggested to him that the weaver had perhaps gone outside his cottage to fetch in fuel, or for some such brief purpose, and had 30 slipped into the Stone-pit. That was an interesting idea to Dunstan, carrying consequences of entire novelty. If the weaver was dead, who had a right to his money ? Who would know where his money was hidden ? *Who would know that anybody had come to take it away ?* He went no further into the subtleties of evidence ; the pressing question,

"Where *is* the money?" now took such entire possession of him as to make him quite forget that the weaver's death was not a certainty. A dull mind, once arriving at an inference that flatters a desire, is rarely able to retain the impression that the notion from which the inference started was purely problematic. And Dunstan's mind was as dull as the mind of a possible felon usually is. There were only three hiding-places where he had ever heard of cottagers' hoards being found—the thatch, the bed, and a hole in the
10 floor. Marner's cottage had no thatch; and Dunstan's first act, after a train of thought made rapid by the stimulus of cupidity, was to go up to the bed; but while he did so his eyes travelled eagerly over the floor, where the bricks, distinct in the fire-light, were discernible under the sprinkling of sand. But not everywhere; for there was one spot, and one only, which was quite covered with sand, and sand showing the marks of fingers, which had apparently been careful to spread it over a given space. It was near the treddles of the loom. In an instant Dunstan darted to that spot, swept away the
20 sand with his whip, and inserting the thin end of the hook between the bricks, found that they were loose. In haste he lifted up two bricks, and saw what he had no doubt was the object of his search; for what could there be but money in those two leathern bags? And from their weight they must be filled with guineas. Dunstan felt round the hole, to be certain that it held no more; then hastily replaced the bricks, and spread the sand over them. Hardly more than five minutes had passed since he entered the cottage, but it seemed to Dunstan like a long while; and though he was
30 without any distinct recognition of the possibility that Marner might be alive, and might re-enter the cottage at any moment, he felt an undefinable dread laying hold on him, as he rose to his feet with the bags in his hand. He would hasten out into the darkness, and then consider what he should do with the bags. He closed the door behind him immediately, that he might shut in the stream of light: a few steps would

be enough to carry him beyond betrayal by the gleams from the shutter-clinks and the latch-hole. The rain and darkness had got thicker, and he was glad of it ; though it was awkward walking with both hands filled, so that it was as much as he could do to grasp his whip along with one of the bags. But when he had gone a yard or two he might take his time. So he stepped forward into the darkness.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Dunstan Cass turned his back on the cottage, Silas Marner was not more than a hundred yards away from it, plodding along from the village with a sack brown round 10 his shoulders as an overcoat, and with a horn lantern in his hand. His legs were weary, but his mind was at ease, free from the presentiment of change. He was thinking with double complacency of his supper—first, because it would be hot and savoury ; and secondly, because it would cost him nothing. For the little bit of pork was a present from that excellent housewife, Miss Priscilla Lammeter, to whom he had this day carried home a handsome piece of linen ; and it was only on occasion of a present like this that Silas indulged himself with roast-meat. Supper was his favourite meal, 20 because it came at his time of revelry, when his heart warmed over his gold ; whenever he had roast-meat, he always chose to have it for supper. But this evening he had no sooner ingeniously knotted his string fast round his bit of pork, twisted the string according to rule over his door-key, passed it through the handle, and made it fast on the hanger, than he remembered that a piece of very fine twine was indispensable to his “ setting up ” a new piece of work in his loom early in the morning. It had slipped his memory, because in coming from Mr. Lammeter’s he had not had to pass 30 through the village ; but to lose time by going on errands in the morning was out of the question. It was a nasty fog

to turn out into, but there were things Silas loved better than his own comfort ; so drawing his pork to the extremity of the hanger, and arming himself with his lantern and his old sack, he set out on what in ordinary weather would have been a twenty minutes' errand. He could not have locked his door without undoing his well-knotted string and retarding his supper ; it was not worth his while to make that sacrifice. What thief would find his way to the Stone-pits on such a night as this ? and why should he come on this particular
10 night, when he had never come through all the fifteen years before ? These questions were not distinctly present in Silas's mind ; they merely serve to represent the vaguely-felt foundation of his freedom from anxiety.

He reached his door in much satisfaction that his errand was done ; he opened it, and to his short-sighted eyes everything remained as he had left it, except that the fire sent out a welcome increase of heat. He trod about the floor while putting by his lantern and throwing aside his hat and sack, so as to merge the marks of Dunstan's feet on the sand in the
20 marks of his own nailed boots. Then he moved his pork nearer to the fire, and sat down to the agreeable business of tending the meat and warming himself at the same time.

As soon as he was warm he began to think it would be a long while to wait till after supper before he drew out his guineas, and it would be pleasant to see them on the table before him as he ate his unwonted feast. For joy is the best of wine, and Silas's guineas were a golden wine of that sort.

He rose and placed his candle unsuspectingly on the floor near his loom, swept away the sand without noticing any
30 change, and removed the bricks. The sight of the empty hole made his heart leap violently, but the belief that his gold was gone could not come at once—only terror and the eager effort to put an end to the terror. He passed his trembling hand all about the hole, trying to think it possible that his eyes had deceived him ; then he held the candle in the hole and examined it curiously, trembling more and

more. At last he shook so violently that he let fall the candle, and lifted his hands to his head, trying to steady himself, that he might think. Had he put his gold somewhere else by a sudden resolution last night, and then forgotten it? A man falling into dark waters seeks a momentary footing even on sliding stones; and Silas, by acting as if he believed in false hopes, warded off the moment of despair. He searched in every corner; he turned his bed over and shook it and kneaded it; he looked in his brick oven where he laid his sticks. When there was no other place to be searched, 10 he kneeled down again and felt once more all round the hole.

Then he got up from his knees, trembling, and looked round at the table. Didn't the gold lie there after all? The table was bare. Then he turned and looked behind him—looked all round his dwelling—seeming to strain his brown eyes after some possible appearance of the bags where he had already sought them in vain. He could see every object in his cottage—and his gold was not there.

Again he put his trembling hands to his head, and gave a wild ringing scream, the cry of desolation. For a few moments 20 after, he stood motionless; but the cry had relieved him from the first maddening pressure of the truth. He turned and tottered towards his loom, and got into the seat where he worked, instinctively seeking this as the strongest assurance of reality.

And now that all the false hopes had vanished, and the first shock of certainty was past, the idea of a thief began to present itself; and he entertained it eagerly, because a thief might be caught and made to restore the gold. The thought brought some new strength with it, and he started 30 from his loom to the door. As he opened it the rain beat in upon him, for it was falling more and more heavily. There were no footsteps to be tracked on such a night. Footsteps? When had the thief come? During Silas's absence in the daytime the door had been locked, and there had been no marks of any inroad on his return by daylight. And in the

evening, too, he said to himself, everything was the same as when he had left it. The sand and bricks looked as if they had not been moved. Was it a thief who had taken the bags ; or was it a cruel power that no hands could reach which had delighted in making him a second time desolate ? He shrank from this vaguer dread, and fixed his mind with struggling effort on the robber with hands, who could be reached by hands. His thoughts glanced at all the neighbours who had made any remarks, or asked any questions which he might
10 now regard as a ground of suspicion. There was Jem Rodney, a known poacher, and otherwise disreputable. He had often met Marner in his journeys across the fields, and had said something jestingly about the weaver's money ; nay, he had once irritated Marner by lingering at the fire when he called to light his pipe, instead of going about his business. Jem Rodney was the man ; there was ease in the thought. Jem could be found and made to restore the money. Marner did not want to punish him, but only to get back his gold which had gone from him, and left his soul like a forlorn
20 traveller on an unknown desert. The robber must be laid hold of. He rushed out in the rain, under the stimulus of this hope, forgetting to cover his head, not caring to fasten his door ; for he felt as if he had nothing left to lose. He ran swiftly, till want of breath compelled him to slacken his pace as he was entering the village at the turning close to the Rainbow.

The Rainbow, in Marner's view, was a place of luxurious resort for rich and stout husbands, whose wives had superfluous stores of linen ; it was the place where he was likely
30 to find the powers and dignities of Raveloe, and where he could most speedily make his loss public. He lifted the latch, and turned into the bright bar or kitchen on the right hand, where the company was assembled.

[The conversation had turned upon ghosts, among other things, and was at a high pitch of animation when Silas entered.]

CHAPTER VI

FOR a few moments there was a dead silence. Marner's want of breath and agitation not allowing him to speak. The landlord, under the habitual sense that he was bound to keep his house open to all company, and confident in the protection of his unbroken neutrality, at last took on himself the task of adjuring the ghost.

"Master Marner," he said, in a conciliatory tone, "what's lacking to you? What's your business here?"

"Robbed!" said Silas gaspingly. "I've been robbed! I want the constable—and the Justice—and Squire Cass— 10 and Mr. Crackenthorp."

"Lay hold on him, Jem Rodney," said the landlord, "he's off his head, I doubt. He's wet through."

Jem Rodney was the outermost man, and sat conveniently near Marner's standing-place; but he declined to give his services.

"Come and lay hold on him yourself, Mr. Snell, if you've a mind," said Jem rather sullenly. "He's been robbed, and murdered too, for what I know," he added in a muttering tone.

"Jem Rodney!" said Silas, turning and fixing his strange 20 eyes on the suspected man.

"Ay, Master Marner, what do ye want wi' me?" said Jem, trembling a little, and seizing his drinking-can as a defensive weapon.

"If it was you stole my money," said Silas, clasping his hands entreatingly, and raising his voice to a cry, "give it me back, and I won't meddle with you. I won't set the constable on you. Give it me back, and I'll let you—I'll let you have a guinea."

"Me stole your money!" said Jem angrily. "I'll pitch 30 this can at your eye if you talk o' *my* stealing your money."

"Come, come, Master Marner," said the landlord, now rising resolutely and seizing Marner by the shoulder, "if

you've got any information to lay, speak it out sensible, and show as you're in your right mind, if you expect anybody to listen to you. You're as wet as a drowned rat. Sit down and dry yourself, and speak straight forrard."

The landlord forced Marner to take off his coat, and then to sit down on a chair aloof from every one else, in the centre of the circle and in the direct rays of the fire. The weaver, too feeble to have any distinct purpose beyond that of getting help to recover his money, submitted unresistingly. The 10 transient fears of the company were now forgotten in their strong curiosity, and all faces were turned towards Silas, when the landlord, having seated himself again, said,—

"Now then, Master Marner, what's this you've got to say—as you've been robbed? Speak out."

"He'd better not say again as it was me robbed him," cried Jem Rodney hastily. "What could I ha' done with his money? I could as easy steal the parson's surplice and wear it."

"Hold your tongue, Jem, and let's hear what he's got to 20 say," said the landlord.—"Now then, Master Marner."

Silas now told his story, under frequent questioning, as the mysterious character of the robbery became evident.

The slight suspicion with which his hearers at first listened to him, gradually melted away before the convincing simplicity of his distress. It was impossible for the neighbours to doubt that Marner was telling the truth, not because they were capable of arguing at once from the nature of his statements to the absence of any motive for making them falsely, but because, as Mr. Macey observed, "Folks as had the devil 30 to back 'em were not likely to be so mushed" as poor Silas was.

"It isn't Jem Rodney as has done this work, Master Marner," said the landlord. "You mustn't be a-casting your eye at poor Jem. There may be a bit of a reckoning against Jem for the matter of a hare or so, if anybody was bound to keep their eyes staring open, and niver to wink ;

but Jem's been a-sitting here drinking his can like the decentest man i' the parish, since before you left your house, Master Marner, by your own account."

"Ay, ay," said Mr. Macey; "let's have no accusing o' the innocent. That isn't the law. There must be folks to swear again' a man before he can be ta'en up. Let's have no accusing o' the innocent, Master Marner."

Memory was not so utterly torpid in Silas that it could not be wakened by these words. With a movement of compunction as new and strange to him as everything else 10 within the last hour, he started from his chair and went close up to Jem, looking at him as if he wanted to assure himself of the expression in his face.

"I was wrong," he said; "yes, yes—I ought to have thought. There's nothing to witness against you, Jem. Only you'd been into my house oftener than anybody else, and so you came into my head. I don't accuse you—I won't accuse anybody—only," he added, lifting up his hands to his head, and turning away with bewildered misery, "I try—I try to think where my guineas can be." 20

"Ay, ay; they're gone where it's hot enough to melt 'em, I doubt," said Mr. Macey.

"Tchuh!" said the farrier. And then he asked, with a cross-examining air, "How much money might there be in the bags, Master Marner?"

"Two hundred and seventy-two pounds twelve and sixpence, last night when I counted it," said Silas, seating himself again with a groan.

"Pooh! why, they'd be none so heavy to carry. Some tramp's been in, that's all; and as for the no footmarks, and 30 the bricks and the sand being all right, why, your eyes are pretty much like a insect's, Master Marner; they're obliged to look so close, you can't see much at a time. It's my opinion as, if I'd been you, or you'd been me—for it comes to the same thing—you wouldn't have thought you'd found everything as you left it. But what I vote is, as two of the

sensiblest o' the company should go with you to Master Kench, the constable's—he's ill i' bed, I know that much—and get him to appoint one of us his deppity; for that's the law, and I don't think anybody 'ull take upon him to contradict me there. It isn't much of a walk to Kench's; and then, if it's me as is deppity, I'll go back with you, Master Marnar, and examine your premises; and if anybody's got any fault to find with that, I'll thank him to stand up and say it out like a man."

- 10 So poor Silas, furnished with some old coverings, turned out with two companions into the rain again, thinking of the long night hours before him, not as those do who long to rest, but as those who expect to "watch for the morning."

CHAPTER VII

- WHEN Godfrey Cass returned from Mrs. Osgood's party at midnight, he was not much surprised to learn that Dunsey had not come home. Perhaps he had not sold Wildfire, and was waiting for another chance; perhaps on that foggy afternoon he had preferred housing himself at the Red Lion at Batherley for the night, if the run had kept him in that neighbourhood—for he was not likely to feel much concern about leaving his brother in suspense. Godfrey's mind was too full of Nancy Lammeter's looks and behaviour, too full of the exasperation against himself and his lot which the sight of her always produced in him, for him to give much thought to Wildfire, or to the probabilities of Dunstan's conduct.
- 20

- The next morning the whole village was excited by the story of the robbery, and Godfrey, like every one else, was occupied in gathering and discussing news about it, and in visiting the Stone-pits. The rain had washed away all possibility of distinguishing footmarks, but a close investigation of the spot had disclosed, in the direction opposite
- 30

to the village, a tinder-box, with a flint and steel, half sunk in the mud. It was not Silas's tinder-box, for the only one he had ever had was still standing on his shelf; and the inference generally accepted was that the tinder-box in the ditch was somehow connected with the robbery. A small minority shook their heads, and intimated their opinion that it was not a robbery to have much light thrown on it by tinder-boxes, that Master Marner's tale had a queer look with it, and that such things had been known as a man's doing himself a mischief, and then setting 10 the justice to look for the doer. But when questioned closely as to their grounds for this opinion, and what Master Marner had to gain by such false pretences, they only shook their heads as before and observed that there was no knowing what some folks counted gain; moreover, that everybody had a right to their own opinions, grounds or no grounds, and that the weaver, as everybody knew, was partly crazy.

By midday Godfrey's interest in the robbery had faded before his growing anxiety about Dunstan and Wildfire, and he was going to Batherley, unable to rest in uncertainty 20 about them any longer. The possibility that Dunstan had played him the ugly trick of riding away with Wildfire, to return at the end of a month, when he had gambled away or otherwise squandered the price of the horse, was a fear that urged itself upon him more even than the thought of an accidental injury; and now that the dance at Mrs. Osgood's was past, he was irritated with himself that he had trusted his horse to Dunstan. Instead of trying to still his fears he encouraged them, with that superstitious impression which clings to us all, that if we expect evil very strongly it is the 30 less likely to come; and when he heard a horse approaching at a trot, and saw a hat rising above a hedge beyond an angle of the lane, he felt as if his conjuration had succeeded. But no sooner did the horse come within sight than his heart sank again. It was not Wildfire; and in a few moments more he discerned that the rider was not Dunstan, but Bryce, who

pulled up to speak, with a face that implied something disagreeable.

"Well, Mr. Godfrey, that's a lucky brother of yours, that Master Dunsey; isn't he?"

"What do you mean?" said Godfrey hastily.

"Why, hasn't he been home yet?" said Bryce.

"Home? no. What has happened? Be quick. What has he done with my horse?"

"Ah! I thought it was yours, though he pretended you 10 had parted with it to him."

"Has he thrown him down and broken his knees?" said Godfrey, flushed with exasperation.

"Worse than that," said Bryce. "You see, I'd made a bargain with him to buy the horse for a hundred and twenty—a swinging price; but I always liked the horse. And what does he do but go and stake him—fly at a hedge with stakes in it, atop of a bank with a ditch before it. The horse had been dead a pretty good while when he was found. So he hasn't been home since, has he?"

20 "Home? No," said Godfrey; "and he'd better keep away. Confound me for a fool! I might have known this would be the end of it."

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Bryce, "after I'd bargained for the horse it did come into my head that he might be riding and selling the horse without your knowledge, for I didn't believe it was his own. I knew Master Dunsey was up to his tricks sometimes. But where can he be gone? He's never been seen at Batherley. He couldn't have been hurt, for he must have walked off."

30 "Hurt?" said Godfrey bitterly. "He'll never be hurt; he's made to hurt other people."

"And so you *did* give him leave to sell the horse, eh?" said Bryce.

"Yes. I wanted to part with the horse; he was always a little too hard in the mouth for me," said Godfrey, his pride making him wince under the idea that Bryce guessed the

sale to be a matter of necessity. "I was going to see after him; I thought some mischief had happened. I'll go back now," he added, turning the horse's head, and wishing he could get rid of Bryce; for he felt that the long-dreaded crisis in his life was close upon him. "You're coming on to Raveloe, aren't you?"

"Well, no, not now," said Bryce. "I *was* coming round there, for I had to go to Flitton, and I thought I might as well take you in my way, and just let you know all I knew myself about the horse. I suppose Master Dunsey didn't 10 like to show himself till the ill news had blown over a bit. He's perhaps gone to pay a visit at the Three Crowns, by Whitbridge; I know he's fond of the house."

"Perhaps he is," said Godfrey, rather absently. Then rousing himself, he said, with an effort at carelessness, "We shall hear of him soon enough, I'll be bound."

"Well, here's my turning," said Bryce, not surprised to perceive that Godfrey was rather "down"; so I'll bid you good-day, and wish I may bring you better news another time." 20

Godfrey rode along slowly, representing to himself the scene of confession to his father from which he felt that there was now no longer any escape. The revelation about the money must be made the very next morning; and if he withheld the rest, Dunstan would be sure to come back shortly, and finding that he must bear the brunt of his father's anger, would tell the whole story out of spite, even though he had nothing to gain by it. There was one step, perhaps, by which he might still win Dunstan's silence and put off the evil day: he might tell his father that he had himself spent 30 the money paid to him by Fowler; and as he had never been guilty of such an offence before, the affair would blow over after a little storming. But Godfrey could not bend himself to this.

After much wavering he determined to try and soften his father's anger against Dunsey, and keep things as nearly as

possible in their old condition. If Dunsey did not come back for a few days (and Godfrey did not know but that the rascal had enough money in his pocket to enable him to keep away still longer), everything might blow over.

CHAPTER VIII

GODFREY rose and took his own breakfast earlier than usual, but lingered in the wainscoted parlour till his younger brothers had finished their meal and gone out; awaiting his father, who always took a walk with his managing man before breakfast. Every one breakfasted at a different hour in the
10 Red House, and the Squire was always the latest, giving a long chance to a rather feeble morning appetite before he tried it. The table had been spread with substantial eatables nearly two hours before he presented himself—a tall, stout man of sixty, with a face in which the knit brow and rather hard glance seemed contradicted by the slack and feeble mouth. His person showed marks of habitual neglect, his dress was slovenly; and yet there was something in the presence of the old Squire distinguishable from that of the
20 ordinary farmers in the parish, who were perhaps every whit as refined as he, but, having slouched their way through life with a consciousness of being in the vicinity of their “betters,” wanted that self-possession and authoritativeness of voice and carriage which belonged to a man who thought of superiors as remote existences with whom he had personally little more to do than with America or the stars. The Squire had been used to parish homage all his life—used to the pre-supposition that his family, his tankards, and everything that was his, were the oldest and best; and as he never associated with any gentry higher than himself, his opinion
30 was not disturbed by comparison.

He glanced at his son as he entered the room, and said, “What, sir! haven’t *you* had your breakfast yet?” But

there was no pleasant morning greeting between them ; not because of any unfriendliness, but because the sweet flower of courtesy is not a growth of such homes as the Red House.

"Yes, sir," said Godfrey, "I've had my breakfast, but I was waiting to speak to you."

"Ah! well," said the Squire, throwing himself indifferently into his chair, and speaking in a ponderous, coughing fashion, which was felt in Raveloe to be a sort of privilege of his rank, while he cut a piece of beef and held it up before the deerhound that had come in with him. "Ring the bell for my ale, will 10 you? You youngsters' business is your own pleasure, mostly. There's no hurry about it for anybody but yourselves."

The Squire's life was quite as idle as his sons', but it was a fiction kept up by himself and his contemporaries in Raveloe that youth was exclusively the period of folly, and that their aged wisdom was constantly in a state of endurance mitigated by sarcasm. Godfrey waited before he spoke again until the ale had been brought and the door closed—an interval during which Fleet, the deerhound, had consumed enough bits of beef to make a poor man's holiday dinner. 20

"There's been a cursed piece of ill-luck with Wildfire," he began; "happened the day before yesterday."

"What! broke his knees?" said the Squire, after taking a draught of ale. "I thought you knew how to ride better than that, sir. I never threw a horse down in my life. If I had, I might ha' whistled for another, for *my* father wasn't quite so ready to unstring as some other fathers I know of."

"It's worse than breaking the horse's knees—he's been staked and killed," he said, as soon as his father was silent and had begun to cut his meat. "But I wasn't thinking of 30 asking you to buy me another horse: I was only thinking I'd lost the means of paying you with the price of Wildfire, as I'd meant to do. Dunsey took him to the hunt to sell him for me the other day, and after he'd made a bargain for a hundred and twenty with Bryce, he went after the hounds, and took some fool's leap or other that did for the

horse at once. 'If it hadn't been for that, I should have paid you a hundred pounds this morning.'

The Squire had laid down his knife and fork, and was staring at his son in amazement, not being sufficiently quick of brain to form a probable guess as to what could have caused so strange an inversion of the paternal and filial relations as this proposition of his son to pay him a hundred pounds.

"The truth is, sir—I'm very sorry—I was quite to blame," said Godfrey. "Fowler did pay that hundred pounds. He 10 paid it to me when I was over there one day last month. And Dunsey bothered me for the money, and I let him have it, because I hoped I should be able to pay it you before this."

The Squire was purple with anger before his son had done speaking, and found utterance difficult. "You let Dunsey have it, sir? And how long have you been so thick with Dunsey that you must *collogue* with him to embezzle my money? Are you turning out a scamp? I tell you I won't have it. I'll turn the whole pack of you out of the house together, and marry again. I'd have you to remember, sir, 20 my property's got no entail on it; since my grandfather's time the Casses can do as they like with their land. Remember that, sir. Let Dunsey have the money! Why should you let Dunsey have the money? There's some lie at the bottom of it."

"There's no lie, sir," said Godfrey. "I wouldn't have spent the money myself; but Dunsey bothered me, and I was a fool, and let him have it. But I meant to pay it, whether he did or not. That's the whole story. I never meant to embezzle money, and I'm not the man to do it. 30 You never knew me do a dishonest trick, sir."

"Where's Dunsey, then? What do you stand talking there for? Go and fetch Dunsey, as I tell you, and let him give account of what he wanted the money for and what he's done with it. He shall repent it. I'll turn him out. I said I would, and I'll do it. He shan't brave me. Go and fetch him."

"Dunsey isn't come back, sir."

"What! did he break his own neck, then?" said the Squire, with some disgust at the idea that in that case he could not fulfil his threat.

"No, he wasn't hurt, I believe, for the horse was found dead, and Dunsey must have walked off. I dare say we shall see him again by-and-by. I don't know where he is."

"And what must you be letting him have my money for? Answer me that," said the Squire, attacking Godfrey again, since Dunsey was not within reach.

"Well, sir, I don't know," said Godfrey, hesitatingly. 10

"You don't know? I tell you what it is, sir. You've been up to some trick, and you've been bribing him not to tell," said the Squire, with a sudden acuteness which startled Godfrey, who felt his heart beat violently at the nearness of his father's guess. The sudden alarm pushed him on to take the next step: a very slight impulse suffices for that on a downward road.

"Why, sir," he said, trying to speak with careless ease, "it was a little affair between me and Dunsey; it's no matter to anybody else. It's hardly worth while to pry into young men's fooleries; it wouldn't have made any difference to you, sir, if I'd not had the bad luck to lose Wildfire. I should have paid you the money."

"Fooleries! Pshaw! it's time you'd done with fooleries. And I'd have you know, sir, you *must* ha' done with 'em," said the Squire, frowning and casting an angry glance at his son. "Your goings-on are not what I shall find money for any longer. There's my grandfather had his stables full o' horses, and kept a good house too, and in worse times, by what I can make out; and so might I, if I hadn't four good- 30 for-nothing fellows to hang on me like horse-leeches. I've been too good a father to you all—that's what it is. But I shall pull up, sir."

Godfrey was silent. The Squire ate his bread and meat hastily, took a deep draught of ale, then turned his chair from the table, and began to speak again.

"It'll be all the worse for you, you know ; you'd need try and help me keep things together."

"Well, sir, I've often offered to take the management of things ; but you know you've taken it ill always, and seemed to think I wanted to push you out of your place."

"I know nothing o' your offering or o' my taking it ill," said the Squire ; "but I know one while you seemed to be thinking o' marrying, and I didn't offer to put any obstacles in your way, as some fathers would. I'd as lieve you married 10 Lammeter's daughter as anybody. I suppose if I'd said you nay you'd ha' kept on with it ; but for want o' contradiction you've changed your mind. You're a shilly-shally fellow ; you take after your poor mother. She never had a will of her own ; a woman has no call for one, if she's got a proper man for her husband. But *your* wife had need have one, for you hardly know your own mind enough to make both your legs walk one way. The lass hasn't said downright she won't have you, has she ?"

"No," said Godfrey, feeling very hot and uncomfortable ; 20 "but I don't think she will."

"Think ! Why, haven't you the courage to ask her ? Do you stick to it, you want to have *her*—that's the thing ?"

"There's no other woman I want to marry," said Godfrey evasively.

"Well, then, let me make the offer for you, that's all, if you haven't the pluck to do it yourself. Lammeter isn't likely to be loath for his daughter to marry into *my* family, I should think. And as for the pretty lass, she wouldn't 30 have her cousin ; and there's nobody else as I see could ha' stood in your way."

"I'd rather let it be, please sir, at present," said Godfrey, in alarm. "I think she's a little offended with me just now, and I should like to speak for myself. A man must manage these things for himself."

"Well, speak, then, and manage it, and see if you can't

turn over a new leaf. That's what a man must do when he thinks o' marrying."

"I don't see how I can think of it at present, sir. You wouldn't like to settle me on one of the farms, I suppose, and I don't think she'd come to live in this house with all my brothers. It's a different sort of life to what she's been used to."

"Not come to live in this house? Don't tell me. You ask her, that's all," said the Squire, with a short, scornful laugh.

10

"I'd rather let the thing be at present, sir," said Godfrey.

"I hope you won't try to hurry it on by saying anything."

"I shall do what I choose," said the Squire, "and I shall let you know I'm master; else you may turn out, and find an estate to drop into somewhere else. Go out and tell Winthrop not to go to Cox's, but wait for me. And tell 'em to get my horse saddled. And stop; look out and get that hack o' Dunsey's sold, and hand me the money, will you? He'll keep no more hacks at my expense. And if you know where he's sneaking—I dare say you do—you may tell him 20 to spare himself the journey o' coming back home. Let him turn ostler, and keep himself. He shan't hang on me any more."

"I don't know where he is; and if I did, it isn't my place to tell him to keep away," said Godfrey, moving towards the door.

"Confound it, sir, don't stay arguing, but go and order my horse," said the Squire, taking up a pipe.

Godfrey left the room, hardly knowing whether he were more relieved by the sense that the interview was ended with- 30 out having made any change in his position, or more uneasy that he had entangled himself still further in prevarication and deceit. What had passed about his proposing to Nancy had raised a new alarm, lest by some after-dinner words of his father's to Mr. Lammeter he should be thrown into the embarrassment of being obliged absolutely to decline her

when she seemed to be within his reach. He fled to his usual refuge—that of hoping for some unforeseen turn of fortune, some favourable chance which would save him from unpleasant consequences.

CHAPTER IX

WEEKS passed away, and there was no other result concerning the robbery than a gradual cessation of the excitement it had caused in Raveloe. Dunstan Cass's absence was hardly a subject of remark. He had once before had a quarrel with his father, and had gone off, nobody knew whither, to
10 return at the end of six weeks, take up his old quarters unforbidden, and swagger as usual. His own family, who equally expected this issue, with the sole difference that the Squire was determined this time to forbid him the old quarters, never mentioned his absence; and when his uncle Kimble or Mr. Osgood noticed it, the story of his having killed Wildfire and committed some offence against his father was enough to prevent surprise. To connect the fact of Dunsey's disappearance with that of the robbery occurring on the
20 same day lay quite away from the track of every one's thought—even Godfrey's, who had better reason than any one else to know what his brother was capable of.

When the robbery was talked of at the Rainbow and elsewhere, in good company, the balance continued to waver between the rational explanation founded on the tinder-box, and the theory of an impenetrable mystery that mocked investigation.

But while poor Silas's loss served thus to brush the slow current of Raveloe conversation, Silas himself was feeling the withering desolation of that bereavement about which
30 his neighbours were arguing at their ease. To any one who had observed him before he lost his gold, it might have seemed that so withered and shrunken a life as his could hardly be

susceptible of a bruise, could hardly endure any subtraction but such as would put an end to it altogether. But in reality it had been an eager life, filled with immediate purpose which fenced him in from the wide, cheerless unknown. It had been a clinging life; and though the object round which its fibres had clung was a dead disrupted thing, it satisfied the need for clinging. But now the fence was broken down—the support was snatched away. Marner's thoughts could no longer move in their old round, and were baffled by a blank like that which meets a plodding ant when the earth has 10 broken away on its homeward path. The loom was there, and the weaving, and the growing pattern in the cloth; but the bright treasure in the hole under his feet was gone; the prospect of handling and counting it was gone—the evening had no phantasm of delight to still the poor soul's craving. The thought of the money he would get by his actual work could bring no joy, for its meagre image was only a fresh reminder of his loss; and hope was too heavily crushed by the sudden blow for his imagination to dwell on the growth of a new hoard from that small beginning. 20

He filled up the blank with grief. As he sat weaving, he every now and then moaned low, like one in pain; it was the sign that his thoughts had come round again to the sudden chasm—to the empty evening-time. And all the evening, as he sat in his loneliness by his dull fire, he leaned his elbows on his knees, and clasped his head with his hands, and moaned very low—not as one who seeks to be heard.

And yet he was not utterly forsaken in his trouble. The repulsion Marner had always created in his neighbours was partly dissipated by the new light in which this misfortune 30 had shown him. Instead of a man who had more cunning than honest folks could come by, and, what was worse, had not the inclination to use that cunning in a neighbourly way, it was now apparent that Silas had not cunning enough to keep his own. He was generally spoken of as a "poor mushed creatur"; and that avoidance of his neighbours,

which had before been referred to his ill-will and to a probable addiction to worse company, was now considered mere craziness.

This change to a kindlier feeling was shown in various ways. The odour of Christmas cooking being on the wind, it was the season when superfluous pork and black puddings are suggestive of charity in well-to-do families ; and Silas's misfortune had brought him uppermost in the memory of housekeepers like Mrs. Osgood. Mr. Crackenthorp too, 10 while he admonished Silas that his money had probably been taken from him because he thought too much of it and never came to church, enforced the doctrine by a present of pigs' pettitoes, well calculated to dissipate unfounded prejudices against the clerical character. Neighbours who had nothing but verbal consolation to give showed a disposition not only to greet Silas and discuss his misfortune at some length when they encountered him in the village, but also to take the trouble of calling at his cottage and getting him to repeat all the details on the very spot ; and then they would try to cheer 20 him by saying, " Well, Master Marner, you're no worse off nor other poor folks, after all ; and if you was to be crippled, the parish 'ud give you a 'lowance."

One of Silas's comforters was Mrs. Winthrop, the wheelwright's wife. She was the person always first thought of in Raveloe when there was illness or death in a family, when leeches were to be applied, or there was a sudden disappointment in a monthly nurse. She was a " comfortable woman " —good-looking, fresh-complexioned, having her lips always slightly screwed, as if she felt herself in a sickroom with the 30 doctor or the clergyman present. But she was never whimpering ; no one had seen her shed tears ; she was simply grave and inclined to shake her head and sigh almost imperceptibly, like a funereal mourner who is not a relation.

This good wholesome woman could hardly fail to have her mind drawn strongly towards Silas Marner, now that he appeared in the light of a sufferer ; and one Sunday afternoon

she took her little boy Aaron with her, and went to call on Silas, carrying in her hand some small lard-cakes—flat paste-like articles much esteemed in Raveloe. Aaron, an apple-cheeked youngster of seven, with a clean starched frill which looked like a plate for the apples, needed all his adventurous curiosity to embolden him against the possibility that the big-eyed weaver might do him some bodily injury; and his dubiety was much increased when, on arriving at the Stone-pits, they heard the mysterious sound of the loom.

“Ah, it is as I thought,” said Mrs. Winthrop sadly. 10

They had to knock loudly before Silas heard them; but when he did come to the door he showed no impatience, as he would once have done, at a visit that had been unasked for and unexpected. Formerly his heart had been as a locked casket with its treasure inside; but now the casket was empty and the lock was broken. Left groping in darkness, with his prop utterly gone, Silas had inevitably a sense, though a dull and half-despairing one, that if any help came to him it must come from without; and there was a slight stirring of expectation at the sight of his fellow men, a faint 20 consciousness of dependence on their good will. He opened the door wide to admit Dolly, but without otherwise returning her greeting than by moving the armchair a few inches as a sign that she was to sit down in it. Dolly, as soon as she was seated, removed the white cloth that covered her lard-cakes, and said in her gravest way,—

“I’d a baking yisterday, Master Marner, and the lard cakes turned out better nor common; and I’d ha’ asked you to accept some, if you’d thought well. I don’t eat such things myself, for a bit o’ bread’s what I like from one year’s end 30 to the other; but men’s stomichs are made so comical they want a change—they do, I know, God help ’em.”

Dolly sighed gently as she held out the cakes to Silas, who thanked her kindly and looked very close at them, absently, being accustomed to look so at everything he took into his hand—eyed all the while by the wondering bright orbs of

the small Aaron, who had made an outwork of his mother's chair, and was peeping round from behind it.

"There's letters pricked on 'em," said Dolly. "I can't read 'em myself, and there's nobody, not Mr. Macey himself, rightly knows what they mean; but they've a good meaning, for they're the same as is on the pulpit-cloth at church.—What are they, Aaron, my dear?"

Aaron retreated completely behind his outwork.

"Oh go; that's naughty," said his mother mildly. "Well, 10 whatever the letters are, they've a good meaning; and it's a stamp as has been in our house, Ben says, ever since he was a little un, and his mother used to put on the cakes, and I've allays put it on too; for if there's any good, we've need of it i' this world."

"It's I. H. S.," said Silas, at which proof of learning Aaron peeped round the chair again.

"Well, to be sure, you can read 'em off," said Dolly. "Ben's read 'em to me many and many a time, but they slip out o' my mind again; the more's the pity, for they're good 20 letters, else they wouldn't be in the church. And so I prick 'em on all the loaves and all the cakes, though sometimes they won't hold, because o' the rising—for, as I said, if there's any good to be got, we've need of it i' this world, that we have. And I hope they'll bring good to you, Master Marner, for it's wi' that will I brought you the cakes; and you see the letters have held better nor common."

Silas was as unable to interpret the letters as Dolly, but there was no possibility of misunderstanding the desire to give comfort that made itself heard in her quiet tones. He 30 said, "Thank you—thank you kindly." But he laid down the cakes and seated himself absently, drearily unconscious of any distinct benefit towards which the cakes and the letters, or even Dolly's kindness, could tend for him.

"Ah, if there's good anywhere, we've need of it," repeated Dolly, who did not lightly forsake a serviceable phrase. She looked at Silas pityingly as she went on. "But you

didn't hear the church bells this morning, Master Marner ? I doubt you didn't know it was Sunday. Living so lone here you lose your count, I dare say ; and then, when your loom makes a noise, you can't hear the bells, more particular now the frost kills the sound."

"Yes, I did ; I heard 'em," said Silas, to whom Sunday bells were a mere accident of the day, and not part of its sacredness. There had been no bells in Lantern Yard.

"Dear heart !" said Dolly, pausing before she spoke again. "But what a pity it is you should work of a Sunday, and 10 not clean yourself—if you *didn't* go to church for if you'd a roasting bit, it might be as you couldn't leave it, being a lone man. But there's the bakehus, if you could make up your mind to spend a twopence on the oven now and then—not every week, in course ; I shouldn't like to do that myself—you might carry your bit o' dinner there ; for it's nothing but right to have a bit o' summat hot of a Sunday, and not to make it as you can't know your dinner from Saturday. But now, upo' Christmas day, this blessed Christ- 20 mas as is ever coming, if you was to take your dinner to the bakehus, and go to church, and see the holly and the yew, and hear the anthim, and then take the sacramen', you'd be a deal the better, and you'd know which end you stood on, and you could put your trust i' Them as knows better nor we do, seein' you'd ha' done what it lies on us all to do."

Dolly's exhortation, which was an unusually long effort of speech for her, was uttered in the soothing, persuasive tone with which she would have tried to prevail on a sick man to take his medicine, or a basin of gruel for which he had 30 no appetite. Silas had never before been closely urged on the point of his absence from church, which had only been thought of as a part of his general queerness ; and he was too direct and simple to evade Dolly's appeal.

"Nay, nay," he said, "I know nothing o' church ; I've never been to church."

"No !" said Dolly, in a low tone of wonderment. Then

bethinking herself of Silas's advent from an unknown country, she said, "Could it ha' been as they'd no church where you was born?"

"Oh yes," said Silas meditatively, sitting in his usual posture of leaning on his knees and supporting his head. "There was churches—a many—it was a big town. But I knew nothing of 'em; I went to chapel."

Dolly was much puzzled at this new word, but she was rather afraid of inquiring further, lest "chapel" might mean
10 some haunt of wickedness. After a little thought she said,—

"Well, Master Marner, it's niver too late to turn over a new leaf; and if you've niver had no church, there's no telling the good it'll do you. For I feel so set up and comfortable as niver was when I've been and heard the prayers, and the singing to the praise and glory o' God, as Mr. Macey gives out; and Mr. Crackenthorp saying good words, and more partic'lar on Sacramen' Day. And if a bit o' trouble comes, I feel as I can put up wi' it, for I've looked for help i' the right quarter, and gev myself up to Them as we must all
20 give ourselves up to at the last; and if we've done our part, it isn't to be believed as Them as are above us 'ull be worse nor we are, and come short o' Their'n."

"But we must be going home now. And so I wish you good-bye, Master Marner; and if you ever feel anyways bad in your inside, as you can't fend for yourself, I'll come and clean up for you, and get you a bit o' victual, and willing. But I beg and pray of you to leave off weaving of a Sunday, for it's bad for soul and body; and the money as comes i' that way 'ull be a bad bed to lie down on at the last, if it
30 doesn't fly away, nobody knows where, like the white frost. And you'll excuse me being that free with you, Master Marner, for I wish you well—I do—Make your bow, Aaron."

Silas said "Good-bye, and thank you kindly" as he opened the door for Dolly, but he couldn't help feeling relieved when she was gone—relieved that he might weave again and moan at his ease. Her simple view of life and its comforts,

by which she had tried to cheer him, was only like a report of unknown objects, which his imagination could not fashion. The fountains of human love and of faith in a divine love had not yet been unlocked, and his soul was still the shrunken rivulet, with only this difference, that its little groove of sand was blocked up, and it wandered confusedly against dark obstruction.

And so, notwithstanding the honest persuasions of Dolly Winthrop, Silas spent his Christmas Day in loneliness, eating his meat in sadness of heart, though the meat had come to 10 him as a neighbourly present. In the morning he looked out on the black frost that seemed to press cruelly on every blade of grass, while the half-icy red pool shivered under the bitter wind; but towards evening the snow began to fall, and curtained from him even that dreary outlook, shutting him close up with his narrow grief. And he sat in his robbed home through the hivelong evening, not caring to close his shutters or lock his door, pressing his head between his hands and moaning, till the cold grasped him and told him that his fire was gray. 20

Nobody in this world but himself knew that he was the same Silas Marner who had once loved his fellow with tender love, and trusted in an unseen goodness. Even to himself that past experience had become dim.

But in Raveloe village the bells rang merrily, and the church was fuller than all through the rest of the year, with red faces among the abundant dark-green boughs—faces prepared for a longer service than usual by an odorous breakfast of toast and ale. Those green boughs, the hymn and anthem never heard but at Christmas—even the Athanasian 30 Creed, which was discriminated from the others only as being longer and of exceptional virtue, since it was only read on rare occasions—brought a vague exulting sense, for which the grown men could as little have found words as the children, that something great and mysterious had been done for them in heaven above and in earth below, which they

were appropriating by their presence. And then the red faces made their way through the black biting frost to their own homes, feeling themselves free for the rest of the day to eat, drink, and be merry, and using that Christian freedom without diffidence.

At Squire Cass's family party that day nobody mentioned Dunstan; nobody was sorry for his absence, or feared it would be too long. The Doctor and his wife, Uncle and Aunt Kimble were there, and the annual Christmas talk was carried
10 through without any omissions.

But the party on Christmas Day being a strictly family party, was not the pre-eminently brilliant celebration of the season at the Red House. It was the great dance on New Year's Eve that made the glory of Squire Cass's hospitality, as of his forefathers', time out of mind. This was the occasion when all the society of Raveloe and Tarley counted on meeting and on comporting themselves with mutual appropriateness. This was the occasion on which fair dames who came on
pillions sent their handboxes before them, supplied with
20 more than their evening costume; for the feast was not to end with a single evening, like a paltry town entertainment, where the whole supply of eatables is put on the table at once, and bedding is scanty. The Red House was provisioned as if for a siege; and as for the spare feather-beds ready to be laid on floors, they were as plentiful as might naturally be expected in a family that had killed its own geese for many generations.

Godfrey Cass was looking forward to this New Year's Eve with a foolish, reckless longing that made him half deaf
30 to his importunate companion Anxiety.

"Dunsey will be coming home soon; there will be a great blow-up; and how will you bribe his spite to silence?" said Anxiety.

"Oh, he won't come home before New Year's Eve, perhaps," said Godfrey; "and I shall sit by Nancy then, and dance with her, and get a kind look from her in spite of herself."

"But money is wanted in another quarter," said Anxiety in a louder voice, "and how will you get it without selling your mother's diamond pin? And if you don't get it . . . ?"

"Well, but something may happen to make things easier. At any rate, there's one pleasure for me close at hand—Nancy is coming."

"Yes, and suppose your father should bring matters to a pass that will oblige you to decline marrying her—and to give your reasons?"

"Hold your tongue, and don't worry me. I can see 10 Nancy's eyes, just as they will look at me, and feel her hand in mine already."

But Anxiety went on, though in noisy Christmas company, refusing to be utterly quieted even by much drinking.

CHAPTER X

SOME women, I grant, would not appear to advantage seated on a pillion, and attired in a drab joseph and a drab beaver-bonnet, with a crown resembling a small stew-pan; for a garment suggesting a coachman's greatcoat, cut out under an exiguity of cloth that would only allow of miniature capes, is not well adapted to conceal deficiencies of contour, 20 nor is drab a colour that will throw sallow cheeks into lively contrast. It was all the greater triumph to Miss Nancy Lammeter's beauty that she looked thoroughly bewitching in that costume, as, seated on the pillion behind her tall, erect father, she held one arm round him, and looked down with open-eyed anxiety at the treacherous snow-covered pools and puddles, which sent up formidable splashings of mud under the stamp of Dobbin's foot. A painter would, perhaps, have preferred her in those moments when she was free from self-consciousness; but certainly the bloom on her 30 cheeks was at its highest point of contrast with the surrounding drab when she arrived at the door of the Red House, and

saw Mr. Godfrey Cass ready to lift her from the pillion. She wished her sister Priscilla had come up at the same time behind the servant, for then she would have contrived that Mr. Godfrey should have lifted off Priscilla first, and in the meantime she would have persuaded her father to go round to the horse-block instead of alighting at the doorsteps. It was very painful, when you had made it quite clear to a young man that you were determined not to marry him, however much he might wish it, that he would still continue
10 to pay you marked attentions: besides, why didn't he always show the same attentions, if he meant them sincerely, instead of being so strange as Mr. Godfrey Cass was—sometimes behaving as if he didn't want to speak to her, and taking no notice of her for weeks and weeks, and then, all on a sudden, almost making love again? Moreover, it was quite plain he had no real love for her, else he would not let people have *that* to say of him which they did say. Did he suppose that Miss Nancy Lammeter was to be won by any man, squire or no squire, who led a bad life? That was not
20 what she had been used to see in her own father, who was the soberest and best man in that country-side—only a little hot and hasty now and then, if things were not done to the minute.

All these thoughts rushed through Miss Nancy's mind, in their habitual succession, in the moments between her first sight of Mr. Godfrey Cass standing at the door and her own arrival there. Happily, the Squire came out too and gave a loud greeting to her father, so that somehow under cover of this noise she seemed to find concealment for her confusion
30 and neglect of any suitably formal behaviour, while she was being lifted from the pillion by strong arms which seemed to find her ridiculously small and light. And there was the best reason for hastening into the house at once, since the snow was beginning to fall again, threatening an unpleasant journey for such guests as were still on the road. These were a small minority, for already the afternoon was beginning

to decline, and there would not be too much time for the ladies who came from a distance to attire themselves in readiness for the early tea which was to inspire them for the dance.

There was a buzz of voices through the house, as Miss Nancy entered, mingled with the scrape of a fiddle prelude in the kitchen ; but the Lammeters were guests whose arrival had evidently been thought of so much that it had been watched for from the windows, for Mrs. Kimble, who did the honours at the Red House on these great occasions, 10 came forward to meet Miss Nancy in the hall and conduct her upstairs. Mrs. Kimble was the Squire's sister, as well as the Doctor's wife—a double dignity with which her diameter was in direct proportion ; so that, a journey upstairs being rather fatiguing to her, she did not oppose Miss Nancy's request to be allowed to find her way alone to the Blue Room, where the Miss Lammeters' bandboxes had been deposited on their arrival in the morning.

There was hardly a bedroom in the house where feminine compliments were not passing and feminine toilettes going 20 forward, in various stages, in space made scanty by extra beds spread upon the floor ; and Miss Nancy, as she entered the Blue Room, had to make her little formal curtsy to a group of six. On the one hand there were ladies no less important than the two Miss Gunns, the wine merchant's daughters from Lytherly, dressed in the height of fashion, with the tightest skirts and the shortest waists, and gazed at by Miss Ladbroke (of the Old Pastures) with a shyness not unsustained by inward criticism. Partly Miss Ladbroke felt that her own skirt must be regarded as unduly lax by the 30 Miss Gunns, and partly that it was a pity the Miss Gunns did not show that judgment which she herself would show if she were in their place, by stopping a little on this side of the fashion. On the other hand, Mrs. Ladbroke was standing in skull-cap and front, with her turban in her hand, curtsying and smiling blandly and saying, " After you,

ma'am," to another lady in similar circumstances, who had politely offered the precedence at the looking-glass.

But Miss Nancy had no sooner made her curtsy than an elderly lady came forward, whose full white muslin kerchief and mob-cap round her curls of smooth gray hair were in daring contrast with the puffed yellow satins and top-knotted caps of her neighbours. She approached Miss Nancy with much primness, and said, with a slow, treble suavity,—

"Niece, I hope I see you well in health." Miss Nancy
10 kissed her aunt's cheek dutifully, and answered, with the same sort of amiable primness, "Quite well, I thank you, aunt; and I hope I see you the same."

"Thank you, niece; I keep my health for the present. And how is my brother-in-law?"

These dutiful questions and answers were continued until it was ascertained in detail that the Lammeters were all as well as usual, and the Osgoods likewise, also that Niece Priscilla must certainly arrive shortly, and that travelling
20 on pillions in snowy weather was unpleasant, though a joseph was a great protection. Then Nancy was formally introduced to her aunt's visitors, the Miss Gunns, as being the daughters of a mother known to *their* mother, though now for the first time induced to make a journey into these parts; and these ladies were so taken by surprise at finding such a lovely face and figure in an out-of-the-way country place that they began to feel some curiosity about the dress she would put on when she took off her joseph. Miss Nancy, whose thoughts were always conducted with the propriety and moderation conspicuous in her manners, remarked to herself that the Miss
30 Gunns were rather hard-featured than otherwise, and that such very low dresses as they wore might have been attributed to vanity if their shoulders had been pretty; but that, being as they were, it was not reasonable to suppose that they showed their necks from a love of display, but rather from some obligation not inconsistent with sense and modesty.

Three of the ladies quickly retired, but the Miss Gunns

were quite content that Mrs. Osgood's inclination to remain with her niece gave them also a reason for staying to see the rustic beauty's toilette. And it was really a pleasure—from the first opening of the bandbox, where everything smelt of lavender and rose-leaves, to the clasping of the small coral necklace that fitted closely round her little white neck. Everything belonging to Miss Nancy was of delicate purity and nattiness ; not a crease was where it had no business to be, not a bit of her linen professed whiteness without fulfilling its profession ; the very pins on her pincushion were stuck 10 in after a pattern from which she was careful to allow no aberration ; and as for her own person, it gave the same idea of perfect unvarying neatness as the body of a little bird. It is true that her light-brown hair was cropped behind like a boy's, and was dressed in front in a number of flat rings, that lay quite away from her face ; but there was no sort of coiffure that could make Miss Nancy's cheek and neck look otherwise than pretty. And when at last she stood complete in her silvery twilled silk, her lace tucker, her coral necklace, and coral ear-drops, the Miss Gunns could see nothing to 20 criticize except her hands, which bore the traces of butter-making, cheese-crushing, and even still coarser work. But Miss Nancy was not ashamed of that, for while she was dressing she narrated to her aunt how she and Priscilla had packed their boxes yesterday, because this morning was baking morning, and since they were leaving home it was desirable to make a good supply of meat pies for the kitchen ; and as she concluded this judicious remark, she turned to the Miss Gunns that she might not commit the rudeness of not including them in the conversation. The Miss Gunns 30 smiled stiffly, and thought what a pity it was that these rich country people, who could afford to buy such good clothes (really Miss Nancy's lace and silk were very costly), should be brought up in utter ignorance and vulgarity. She actually said "mate" for "meat," "'appen" for "perhaps," and "oss" for "horse," which, to young ladies

living in good Lytherly society, who habitually said 'orse, even in domestic privacy, and only said 'appen on the right occasions, was necessarily shocking. Miss Nancy, indeed, had never been to any school higher than Dame Tedman's; her acquaintance with profane literature hardly went beyond the rhymes she had worked in her large sampler under the lamb and the shepherdess; and in order to balance an account she was obliged to effect her subtraction by removing visible metallic shillings and sixpences from a visible metallic
10 total. There is hardly a servant-maid in these days who is not better informed than Miss Nancy; yet she had the essential attributes of a lady—high veracity, delicate honour in her dealings, deference to others, and refined personal habits; and lest these should not suffice to convince grammatical fair ones that her feelings can at all resemble theirs, I will add that she was slightly proud and exacting, and as constant in her affection towards a baseless opinion as towards an erring lover.

The anxiety about Sister Priscilla, which had grown rather
20 active by the time the coral necklace was clasped, was happily ended by the entrance of that cheerful-looking lady herself, with a face made blowsy by cold and damp. After the first questions and greetings, she turned to Nancy and surveyed her from head to foot; then wheeled her round to ascertain that the back view was equally faultless.

"What do you think o' *these* gowns, Aunt Osgood?" said Priscilla, while Nancy helped her to unrobe.

"Very handsome indeed, niece," said Mrs. Osgood, with a slight increase of formality. She always thought Niece
30 Priscilla too rough.

"I'm obliged to have the same as Nancy, you know, for all I'm five years older, and it makes me look yallow; for she never *will* have anything without I have mine just like it, because she wants us to look like sisters. And I tell her folks 'ull think it's my weakness makes me fancy as I shall look pretty in what she looks pretty in. For I *am* ugly—

there's no denying that ; I feature my father's family. But, law ! I don't mind, do you ? ”

As the two Miss Lammeters walked into the large parlour together, any one who did not know the character of both might certainly have supposed that the reason why the square-shouldered, clumsy, high-featured Priscilla wore a dress the facsimile of her pretty sister's was either the mistaken vanity of the one or the malicious contrivance of the other, in order to set off her own rare beauty. But the good-natured, self-forgetful cheeriness and common-sense of Priscilla would 10 soon have dissipated the one suspicion ; and the modest calm of Nancy's speech and manners told clearly of a mind free from all disavowed devices.

Places of honour had been kept for the Miss Lammeters near the head of the principal tea-table in the wainscoted parlour, now looking fresh and pleasant with handsome branches of holly, yew, and laurel, from the abundant growths of the old garden ; and Nancy felt an inward flutter that no firmness of purpose could prevent when she saw Mr. Godfrey Cass advancing to lead her to a seat between himself and 20 Mr. Crackenthorp, while Priscilla was called to the opposite side between her father and the Squire. It certainly did make some difference to Nancy that the lover she had given up was the young man of quite the highest consequence in the parish—at home in a venerable and unique parlour, which was the extremity of grandeur in her experience, a parlour where *she* might one day have been mistress, with the consciousness that she was spoken of as “ Madam Cass,” the Squire's wife. These circumstances exalted her inward drama in her own eyes, and deepened the emphasis with which 30 she declared to herself that not the most dazzling rank should induce her to marry a man whose conduct showed him careless of his character, but that “ love once, love always,” was the motto of a true and pure woman, and no man should ever have any right over her which would be a call on her to destroy the dried flowers that she treasured, and always would

treasure, for Godfrey Cass's sake. And Nancy was capable of keeping her word to herself under very trying conditions. Nothing but a becoming blush betrayed the moving thoughts that urged themselves upon her as she accepted the seat next to Mr. Craokenthorp; for she was so instinctively neat and adroit in all her actions, and her pretty lips met each other with such quiet firmness, that it would have been difficult for her to appear agitated.

Presently the sound of a fiddle approaching within a distance at which it could be heard distinctly, made the young people look at each other with sympathetic impatience for the end of the meal.

"Why, there's Solomon in the hall," said the Squire. "Bob," he called out to his third long-legged son, who was at the other end of the room, "open the door, and tell Solomon to come in. He shall give us a tune here."

Solomon Macey, a small, hale old man, with an abundant crop of long white hair reaching nearly to his shoulders, advanced to the indicated spot, bowing reverently while
20 he fiddled, as much as to say that he respected the company though he respected the keynote more. As soon as he had repeated the tune and lowered his fiddle, he bowed again to the Squire and the Rector, and said, "I hope I see your honour and your reverence well, and wishing you health and long life and a happy New Year. And wishing the same to you, Mr. Lammeter, sir, and to the other gentlemen, and the madams, and the young lasses."

As Solomon uttered the last words he bowed in all directions solicitously, lest he should be wanting in due respect. But
30 thereupon he immediately began to prelude, and fell into the tune which he knew would be taken as a special compliment by Mr. Lammeter.

"Thank ye, Solomon, thank ye," said Mr. Lammeter when the fiddle paused again. "That's 'Over the hills and far away,' that is. My father used to say to me, whenever we heard that tune, 'Ah, lad, I come from over the hills and

far away.' There's a many tunes I don't make head or tail of; but that speaks to me like the blackbird's whistle. I suppose it's the name; there's a deal in the name of a tune."

But Solomon was already impatient to prelude again, and presently broke with much spirit into "Sir Roger de Coverley," at which there was a sound of chairs pushed back and laughing voices.

"Ay, ay, Solomon, we know what that means," said the Squire, rising. "It's time to begin the dance, eh? Lead the way, then, and we'll all follow you."

10

So Solomon, holding his white head on one side and playing vigorously, marched forward at the head of the gay procession into the White Parlour, where the mistletoe bough was hung, and multitudinous tallow candles made rather a brilliant effect, gleaming from among the berried holly boughs, and reflected in the old-fashioned oval mirrors fastened in the panels of the white wainscot. A quaint procession! Old Solomon, in his seedy clothes and long white locks, seemed to be luring that decent company by the magic scream of his fiddle: luring discreet matrons in turban-shaped caps—nay, 20 Mrs. Crackenthorp herself, the summit of whose perpendicular feather was on a level with the Squire's shoulder; luring fair lasses complacently conscious of very short waists and skirts blameless of front-folds; luring burly fathers in large variegated waistcoats, and ruddy sons, for the most part shy and sheepish, in short nether garments and very long coat-tails.

Already Mr. Macey and a few other privileged villagers, who were allowed to be spectators on these great occasions, were seated on benches placed for them near the door; and great was the admiration and satisfaction in that quarter 30 when the couples had formed themselves for the dance, and the Squire led off with Mrs. Crackenthorp, joining hands with the Rector and Mrs. Osgood. That was as it should be—that was what everybody had been used to—and the charter of Raveloe seemed to be renewed by the ceremony.

There was no reason why the Rector's dancing should not

be received as part of the fitness of things quite as much as the Squire's ; or why, on the other hand, Mr. Macey's official respect should restrain him from subjecting the parson's performance to that criticism with which minds of extraordinary acuteness must necessarily contemplate the doings of their fallible fellowmen.

"The Squire's pretty springe, considering his weight," said Mr. Macey, "and he stamps uncommon well. But Mr. Lammeter beats 'em all for shapes ; you see he holds his
10 head like a sodger, and he isn't so cushiony as most o' the oldish gentlefolks—they run fat in general—and he's got a fine leg. The parson's nimble enough, but he hasn't got much of a leg : it's a bit too thick down'ard, and his knees might be a bit nearer wi'out damage. But he might do worse, he might do worse ; though he hasn't that grand way o' waving his hand as the Squire has."

"Talk o' nimbleness, look at Mrs. Osgood," said Ben Winthrop, who was holding his son Aaron between his knees.
"She trips along with her little steps so as nobody can see
20 how she goes ; it's like as if she had little wheels to her feet. She doesn't look a day older nor last year ; she's the finest-made woman as is, let the next be where she will."

"I don't heed how the women are made," said Mr. Macey, with some contempt. "They wear nayther coat nor breeches ; you can't make much out o' their shapes."

"Fayder," said Aaron, whose feet were busy beating out the tune, "how does that big cock's feather stick in Mrs. Crackenthorp's yead ? Is there a little hole for it, like in my shuttlecock ?"

30 "Hush, lad, hush ; that's the way the ladies dress themselves, that is," said the father ; adding, however, in an undertone to Mr. Macey, "It does make her look funny, though—partly like a short-necked bottle wi' a long quill in it. Hey, by jingo, there's the young Squire leading off now, wi' Miss Nancy for partners ! There's a lass for you '—like a pink-and-white posy ; there's nobody 'ud think as anybody

could be so pritty. I shouldn't wonder if she's Madam Cass some day, arter all : and nobody more rightfuller, for they'd make a fine match. You can find nothing against Master Godfrey's shapes, Macey, I'll bet a penny."

Mr. Macey screwed up his mouth, leaned his head farther on one side, and twirled his thumbs with a presto movement as his eyes followed Godfrey up the dance. At last he summed up his opinion.

' Pretty well down'ard, but a bit too round i' the shoulder-blades. And as for them coats as he gets from the Flitton 10 tailor, they're a poor cut to pay double money for."

" Ah Mr. Macey, you and me are two folk ," said Ben, slightly indignant at this carping. " When I've got a pot o' good ale, I like to swaller it, and do my inside good, i'stead o' smelling and staring at it to see if I can't find fault wi' the brewing. I should like you to pick me out : a finer-limbed young fellow nor Master Godfrey—one as 'ud knock you down easier, or 's more pleasanter looksed when he's piert and merry."

" Tchuh ! " said Mr. Macey, provoked to increased severity, 20
" he isn't come to his right colour yet ; he's partly like a slack-baked pie. And I doubt he's got a soft place in his head, else why should he be turned round the finger by that offal Dunsey as nobody's seen o' late, and let him kill that fine hunting hoss as was the talk o' the country ? And one while he was allays after Miss Nancy, and then it all went off again, like a smell o' hot porridge, as I may say. That wasn't my way when I went a-coorting."

" Ah, but mayhap Miss Nancy hung off like, and your lass didn't," said Ben. 30

" I should say she didn't," said Mr. Macey significantly. " Before I said 'sniff' I took care to know as she'd say 'snaff,' and pretty quick too. I wasn't a-going to open my mouth, like a dog at a fly, and snap it to again, wi' nothing to swaller."

" Well, I think Miss Nancy's a-coming round again," said

Ben, "for Master Godfrey doesn't look so down-hearted to-night. And I see he's for taking her away to sit down, now they're at the end o' the dance; that looks like sweet-hearting, that does."

The reason why Godfrey and Nancy had left the dance was not so tender as Ben imagined. In the close press of couples a slight accident had happened to Nancy's dress, which, while it was short enough to show her neat ankle in front, was long enough behind to be caught under the
10 stately stamp of the Squire's foot, so as to rend certain stitches at the waist, and cause much sisterly agitation in Priscilla's mind, as well as serious concern in Nancy's. One's thoughts may be much occupied with love-struggles, but hardly so as to be insensible to a disorder in the general framework of things. Nancy had no sooner completed her duty in the figure they were dancing than she said to Godfrey, with a deep blush, that she must go and sit down till Priscilla could come to her; for the sisters had already exchanged a short whisper and an open-eyed glance full of meaning.
20 No reason less urgent than this could have prevailed on Nancy to give Godfrey this opportunity of sitting apart with her. As for Godfrey, he was feeling so happy and oblivious under the long charm of the country-dance with Nancy that he got rather bold on the strength of her confusion, and was capable of leading her straight away, without leave asked, into the adjoining small parlour, where the card-tables were set.

"Oh no, thank you," said Nancy coldly, as soon as she perceived where he was going; "not in there. I'll wait here
30 till Priscilla's ready to come to me. I'm sorry to bring you out of the dance and make myself troublesome."

"Why, you'll be more comfortable here by yourself," said the artful Godfrey. "I'll leave you here till your sister can come." He spoke in an indifferent tone.

That was an agreeable proposition, and just what Nancy desired; why, then, was she a little hurt that Mr. Godfrey

should make it ? They entered, and she seated herself on a chair against one of the card-tables. as the stiffest and most unapproachable position she could choose.

"Thank you, sir," she said immediately. "I needn't give you any more trouble. I'm sorry you've had such an unlucky partner."

"That's very ill-natured of you," said Godfrey, standing by her without any sign of intended departure "to be sorry you've danced with me."

"Oh no, sir, I don't mean to say what's ill-natured at all," 10 said Nancy, looking distractingly prim and pretty. "When gentlemen have so many pleasures, one dance can matter but very little."

"You know that isn't true. You know one dance with you matters to me more than all the other pleasures in the world."

It was a long, long while since Godfrey had said anything so direct as that, and Nancy was startled. But her instinctive dignity and repugnance to any show of emotion made her sit perfectly still, and only throw a little more decision into 20 her voice as she said,—

"No, indeed, Mr. Godfrey, that's not known to me, and I have very good reasons for thinking different. But if it's true I don't wish to hear it."

"Would you never forgive me then, Nancy—never think well of me, let what would happen ? Would you never think the present made amends for the past ? Not if I turned a good fellow, and gave up everything you didn't like ?"

Godfrey was half conscious that this sudden opportunity of speaking to Nancy alone had driven him beside himself ; 30 but blind feeling had got the mastery of his tongue. Nancy really felt much agitated by the possibility Godfrey's words suggested, but this very pressure of emotion that she was in danger of finding too strong for her roused all her power of self-command.

"I should be glad to see a good change in anybody, Mr.

Godfrey," she answered, with the slightest discernible difference of tone. "but it 'ud be better if no change was wanted."

"You're very hard-hearted, Nancy," said Godfrey pettishly. "You might encourage me to be a better fellow. I'm very miserable. But you've no feeling."

"I think those have the least feeling that act wrong to begin with," said Nancy, sending out a flash in spite of herself. Godfrey was delighted with that little flash, and would have
10 liked to go on and make her quarrel with him; Nancy was so exasperatingly quiet and firm. But she was not indifferent to him *yet*.

The entrance of Priscilla, bustling forward and saying, "Dear heart alive, child, let us look at this gown," cut off Godfrey's hopes of a quarrel.

"I suppose I must go now," he said to Priscilla.

"It's no matter to me whether you go or stay," said that frank lady, searching for something in her pocket with a preoccupied brow.

20 "Do *you* want me to go?" said Godfrey, looking at Nancy, who was now standing up by Priscilla's order.

"As you like," said Nancy, trying to recover all her former coldness, and looking down carefully at the hem of her gown.

"Then I like to stay," said Godfrey, with a reckless determination to get as much of this joy as he could to-night and think nothing of the morrow.

CHAPTER XI

WHILE Godfrey Cass was taking draughts of forgetfulness from the sweet presence of Nancy, willingly losing all sense of that hidden bond which at other moments galled and
30 fretted him so as to mingle irritation with the very sunshine, Godfrey's wife was walking with slow, uncertain steps through the snow-covered Raveloe lanes, carrying her child in her arms.

This journey on New Year's Eve was a premeditated act of vengeance which she had kept in her heart ever since Godfrey, in a fit of passion, had told her he would sooner die than acknowledge her as his wife. There would be a great party at the Red House on New Year's Eve, she knew; her husband would be smiling and smiled upon, hiding *her* existence in the darkest corner of his heart. But she would mar his pleasure; she would go in her dingy rags, with her faded face, once as handsome as the best, with her little child that had its father's hair and eyes, and disclose herself 10 to the Squire as his eldest son's wife. It is seldom that the miserable can help regarding their misery as a wrong inflicted by those who are less miserable. Molly knew that the cause of her dingy rags was not her husband's neglect, but the demon Opium to whom she was enslaved. Body and soul, except in the lingering mother's tenderness that refused to give him her hungry child. She knew this well; and yet, in the moments of wretched unbenumbed consciousness, the sense of her want and degradation transformed itself continually into bitterness towards Godfrey. *He* was well off; 20 and if she had her rights she would be well off too. The belief that he repented his marriage and suffered from it only aggravated her vindictiveness.

She had set out at an early hour, but had lingered on the road, inclined by her indolence to believe that if she waited under a warm shed the snow would cease to fall. She had waited longer than she knew, and now that she found herself belated in the snow-hidden ruggedness of the long lanes, even the animation of a vindictive purpose could not keep her spirit from failing. It was seven o'clock, and by this time 30 she was not very far from Raveloe, but she was not familiar enough with those monotonous lanes to know how near she was to her journey's end. She needed comfort, and she knew but one comforter—the familiar demon in her bosom; but she hesitated a moment, after drawing out the black remnant, before she raised it to her lips. In that moment

the mother's love pleaded for painful consciousness rather than oblivion—pleaded to be left in aching weariness rather than to have the encircling arms benumbed so that they could not feel the dear burden. In another moment M^rlly had flung something away ; but it was not the black remnant—it was an empty phial. And she walked on again under the breaking cloud, from which there came now and then the light of a quickly veiled star, for a freezing wind had sprung up since the snowing had ceased. But she walked
10 always more and more drowsily, and clutched more and more automatically the sleeping child at her bosom.

Slowly the demon was working his will, and cold and weariness were his helpers. Soon she felt nothing but a supreme immediate longing that curtained off all futurity—the longing to lie down and sleep. She had arrived at a spot where her footsteps were no longer checked by a hedgerow, and she had wandered vaguely, unable to distinguish any objects, notwithstanding the wide whiteness around her, and the growing starlight. She sank down against a straggling
20 furze bush—an easy pillow enough ; and the bed of snow, too, was soft. She did not feel that the bed was cold, and did not heed whether the child would wake and cry for her. But her arms had not yet relaxed their instinctive clutch, and the little one slumbered on as gently as if it had been rocked in a lace-trimmed cradle.

But the complete torpor came at last : the fingers lost their tension, the arms unbent ; then the little head fell away from the bosom, and the blue eyes opened wide on the cold starlight. At first there was a little peevish cry of “ mammy,”
30 and an effort to regain the pillowing arm and bosom ; but mammy's ear was deaf, and the pillow seemed to be slipping away backward. Suddenly, as the child rolled downward on its mother's knees, all wet with snow, its eyes were caught by a bright glancing light on the white ground, and, with the ready transition of infancy, it was immediately absorbed in watching the bright living thing running towards it, yet

never arriving. That bright living thing must be caught ; and in an instant the child had slipped on all-fours, and held out one little hand to catch the gleam. But the gleam would not be caught in that way, and now the head was held up to see where the cunning gleam came from. It came from a very bright place ; and the little one, rising on its legs, toddled through the snow, the old grimy shawl in which it was wrapped trailing behind it, and the queer little bonnet dangling at its back—toddled on to the open door of Silas Marner's cottage, and right up to the warm hearth, where 10 there was a bright fire of logs and sticks, which had thoroughly warmed the old sack (Silas's greatcoat) spread out on the bricks to dry. The little one, accustomed to be left to itself for long hours without notice from its mother, squatted down on the sack, and spread its tiny hands towards the blaze in perfect contentment, gurgling and making many inarticulate communications to the cheerful fire, like a new-hatched gosling beginning to find itself comfortable. But presently the warmth had a lulling effect, and the little golden head sank down on the old sack, and the blue eyes were veiled 20 by their delicate half-transparent lids.

But where was Silas Marner while this strange visitor had come to his hearth ? He was in the cottage, but he did not see the child. During the last few weeks, since he had lost his money, he had contracted the habit of opening his door and looking out from time to time, as if he thought that his money might be somehow coming back to him, or that some trace, some news of it, might be mysteriously on the road, and be caught by the listening ear or the straining eye. It was chiefly at night, when he was not occupied in his loom, 30 that he fell into this repetition of an act for which he could have assigned no definite purpose, and which can hardly be understood except by those who have undergone a bewildering separation from a supremely loved object. In the evening twilight, and later whenever the night was not dark, Silas looked out on that narrow prospect round the Stone-pits,

listening and gazing, not with hope, but with mere yearning and unrest.

This morning he had been told by some of his neighbours that it was New Year's Eve, and that he must sit up and hear the old year rung out and the new rung in, because that was good luck, and might bring his money back again. This was only a friendly Raveloe way of jesting with the half-crazy oddities of a miser, but it had perhaps helped to throw Silas into a more than usually excited state. Since the oncoming
10 of twilight he had opened his door again and again, though only to shut it immediately at seeing all distance veiled by the falling snow. But the last time he opened it the snow had ceased, and the clouds were parting here and there. He stood and listened, and gazed for a long while: there was really something on the road coming towards him then, but he caught no sign of it; and the stillness and the wide trackless snow seemed to narrow his solitude, and touched his yearning with the chill of despair. He went in again, and put his right hand on the latch of the door to close it; but he did not close
20 it. He was arrested, as he had been already since his loss, by the invisible wand of catalepsy, and stood like a graven image, with wide but sightless eyes, holding open his door, powerless to resist either the good or evil that might enter there.

When Marner's sensibility returned he continued the action which had been arrested, and closed his door, unaware of the chasm in his consciousness, unaware of any intermediate change, except that the light had grown dim, and that he was chilled and faint. He thought he had been too long standing at the door and looking out. Turning towards the hearth,
30 where the two logs had fallen apart, and sent forth only a red uncertain glimmer, he seated himself on his fireside chair, and was stooping to push his logs together, when to his blurred vision it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in front of the hearth. Gold—his own gold—brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he

was unable to stretch out his hand and grasp the restored treasure. The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand ; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. In utter amazement Silas fell on his knees and bent his head low to examine the marvel : it was a sleeping child—a round, fair thing, with soft yellow rings all over its head. Could this be his little sister come back to him in a dream—his little sister whom he had carried about in his 10 arms for a year before she died, when he was a small boy without shoes or stockings ? That was the first thought that darted across Silas's blank wonderment. *Was it a dream ?* He rose to his feet again, pushed his logs together, and, throwing on some dried leaves and stick , raised a flame. But the flame did not disperse the vision ; it only lit up more distinctly the little round form of the child and its shabby clothing. It was very much like his little sister. Silas sank into his chair powerless, under the double presence of an inexplicable surprise and a hurrying influx of memories. How 20 and when had the child come in without his knowledge ? He had never been beyond the door. But along with that question, and almost thrusting it away, there was a vision of the old home and the old streets leading to Lantern Yard ; and within that vision another, of the thoughts which had been present with him in those far-off scenes. The thoughts were strange to him now, like old friendships impossible to revive ; and yet he had a dreamy feeling that this child was somehow a message come to him from that far-off life : it stirred fibres that had never been moved in Raveloe—old 30 quiverings of tenderness—old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life ; for his imagination had not yet extricated itself from the sense of mystery in the child's sudden presence, and had formed no conjectures of ordinary natural means by which the event could have been brought about.

But there was a cry on the hearth : the child had awaked, and Marner stooped to lift it on his knee. It clung round his neck and burst louder and louder into that mingling of inarticulate cries with "mammy" by which little children express the bewilderment of waking. Silas pressed it to him, and almost unconsciously uttered sounds of hushing tenderness, while he bethought himself that some of his porridge, which had got cool by the dying fire, would do to feed the child with if it were only warmed up a little.

- 10 He had plenty to do through the next hour. The porridge, sweetened with some dry brown sugar from an old store which he had refrained from using for himself, stopped the cries of the little one, and made her lift her blue eyes with a wide, quiet gaze at Silas as he put the spoon into her mouth. Presently she slipped from his knee and began to toddle about, but with a pretty stagger that made Silas jump up and follow her lest she should fall against anything that would hurt her. But she only fell in a sitting posture on the ground, and began to pull at her boots, looking up at him with
- 20 a crying face as if the boots hurt her. He took her on his knee again, but it was some time before it occurred to Silas's dull bachelor mind that the wet boots were the grievance, pressing on her warm ankles. He got them off with difficulty, and baby was at once happily occupied with the primary mystery of her own toes, inviting Silas, with much chuckling, to consider the mystery too. But the wet boots had at last suggested to Silas that the child had been walking on the snow, and this roused him from his entire oblivion of any ordinary means by which it could have entered or been
- 30 brought into his house. Under the prompting of this new idea, and without waiting to form conjectures, he raised the child in his arms, and went to the door. As soon as he had opened it there was the cry of "mammy" again, which Silas had not heard since the child's first hungry waking. Bending forward, he could just discern the marks made by the little feet on the virgin snow, and he followed their track to the

furze bushes. "Mammy!" the little one cried again and again, stretching itself forward, so as almost to escape from Silas's arms, before he himself was aware that there was something more than the bush before him—that there was a human body, with the head sunk low in the furze, and half covered with the shaken snow.

CHAPTER XII

It was after the early supper-time at the Rectory House, and the entertainment was in that stage when bashfulness itself had passed into easy jollity, when gentlemen, conscious of unusual accomplishments, could at length be prevailed on to dance 10 a hornpipe, and when the Squire preferred talking loudly, scattering snuff, and patting his visitors' backs, to sitting longer at the whist-table. When the evening had advanced to this pitch of freedom and enjoyment, it was usual for the servants, the heavy duties of supper being well over, to get their share of amusement by coming to look on at the dancing; so that the back regions of the house were left in solitude.

There were two doors by which the White Parlour was entered from the hall, and they were both standing open for 20 the sake of air; but the lower one was crowded with the servants and villagers, and only the upper doorway was left free. Bob Cass was figuring in a hornpipe, and his father, very proud of this little son, whom he repeatedly declared to be just like himself in his young days in a tone that implied this to be the very highest stamp of juvenile merit, was the centre of a group who had placed themselves opposite the performer, not far from the upper door. Godfrey was standing a little way off, not to admire his brother's dancing, but to keep sight of Nancy, who was seated in the group, 30 near her father. He had the prospect of dancing with her again when the hornpipe was concluded, and in the meanwhile

it was very pleasant to get long glances at her quite unobserved.

But when Godfrey was lifting his eyes from one of those long glances they encountered an object as startling to him at that moment as if it had been an apparition from the dead. It *was* an apparition from that hidden life which lies, like a dark by-street, behind the goodly ornamented façade that meets the sunlight and the gaze of respectable admirers. It was his own child, carried in Silas Marner's arms. That
10 was his instantaneous impression, unaccompanied by doubt, though he had not seen the child for months past ; and when the hope was rising that he might possibly be mistaken, Mr. Crackenthorp and Mr. Lammeter had already advanced to Silas, in astonishment at this strange advent. Godfrey joined them immediately, unable to rest without hearing every word—trying to control himself, but conscious that if any one noticed him, they must see that he was white-lipped and trembling.

But now all eyes at that end of the room were bent on
20 Silas Marner ; the Squire himself had risen, and asked angrily, "How's this ?—what's this ?—what do you do coming in here in this way ?"

"I'm come for the Doctor—I want the Doctor," Silas had said, in the first moment, to Mr. Crackenthorp.

"Why, what's the matter, Marner ?" said the Rector. "The Doctor's here ; but say quietly what you want him for."

"It's a woman," said Silas, speaking low and half breathlessly, just as Godfrey came up. "She's dead, I think—dead in the snow at the Stone-pits, not far from my door."

30 Godfrey felt a great throb ; there was one terror in his mind at that moment ; it was, that the woman might *not* be dead. That was an evil terror—an ugly inmate to have found a nestling-place in Godfrey's kindly disposition ; but no disposition is a security from evil wishes to a man whose happiness hangs on duplicity.

"Hush, hush !" said Mr. Crackenthorp. "Go out into

the hall there. I'll fetch the Doctor to you.—Found a woman in the snow, and thinks she's dead," he added, speaking low, to the Squire. "Better say as little about it as possible; it will shock the ladies. Just tell them a poor woman is ill from cold and hunger. I'll go and fetch Kimble."

By this time, however, the ladies had pressed forward, curious to know what could have brought the solitary linen-weaver there under such strange circumstances and interested in the pretty child, who, half alarmed and half attracted by the brightness and the numerous company now frowned 10 and hid her face, now lifted up her head again and looked round placably, until a touch or a coaxing word brought back the frown, and made her bury her face with new determination.

"What child is it?" said several ladies at once, and among the rest Nancy Lammeter, addressing Godfrey.

"I don't know—some poor woman's who has been found in the snow, I believe," was the answer Godfrey wrung from himself with a terrible effort. ("After all, am I certain?" he hastened to add, in anticipation of his own conscience.)

"Why, you'd better leave the child here, then, Master 20 Marner," said good-natured Mrs. Kimble, hesitating, however, to take those dingy clothes into contact with her own ornamented satin bodice. "I'll tell one o' the girls to fetch it."

"No, no; I can't part with it; I can't let it go," said Silas abruptly. "It's come to me: I've a right to keep it."

The proposition to take the child from him had come to Silas quite unexpectedly, and his speech, uttered under a strong sudden impulse, was almost like a revelation to himself. A minute before he had no distinct intention about the child.

"Did you ever hear the like?" said Mrs. Kimble in mild 30 surprise to her neighbour.

"Now, ladies, I must trouble you to stand aside," said Mr. Kimble, coming from the card-room, in some bitterness at the interruption, but drilled by the long habit of his profession into obedience to unpleasant calls, even when he was hardly sober.

"It's a nasty business turning out now, eh, Kimble?" said the Squire. "He might ha' gone for your young fellow—the 'prentice there—what's his name?"

"Might? ay, what's the use of talking about might?" growled Uncle Kimble, hastening out with Marner, and followed by Mr. Crackenthorp and Godfrey.—"Get me a pair of thick boots. Godfrey, will you? And stay—let somebody run to Winthrop's and fetch Dolly; she's the best woman to get. Ben was here himself before supper; is he
10 gone?"

"Yes, sir, I met him," said Marner; "but I couldn't stop to tell him anything, only I said I was going for the Doctor, and he said the Doctor was at the Squire's. And I made haste and ran, and there was nobody to be seen at the back o' the house, and so I went in to where the company was."

The child, no longer distracted by the bright light and the smiling women's faces, began to cry and call for "mammy," though always clinging to Marner, who had apparently won her thorough confidence. Godfrey had come back with the
20 boots, and felt the cry as if some fibre were drawn tight within him.

"I'll go," he said hastily, eager for some movement; "I'll go and fetch the woman—Mrs. Winthrop."

"Oh, pooh! send somebody else," said Uncle Kimble, hurrying away with Marner.

"You'll let me know if I can be of any use, Kimble," said Mr. Crackenthorp. But the Doctor was out of hearing.

Godfrey too had disappeared: he was gone to snatch his hat and coat, having just reflection enough to remember that
30 he must not look like a madman; but he rushed out of the house into the snow without heeding his thin shoes.

In a few minutes he was on his rapid way to the Stone-pits by the side of Dolly, who, though feeling that she was entirely in her place in encountering cold and snow on an errand of mercy, was much concerned at a young gentleman's getting his feet wet under a like impulse.

"You'd a deal better go back, sir," said Dolly, with respectful compassion. "You've no call to catch cold; and I'd ask you if you'd be so good as tell my husband to come, on your way back—he's at the Rainbow, I doubt—if you found him anyway sober enough to be o' use. Or else, there's Mrs. Snell 'ud happen send the boy up to fetch and carry, for there may be things wanted from the Doctor's."

"No, I'll stay; now I'm once out, I'll stay outside here," said Godfrey, when they came opposite Manner's cottage. "You can come and tell me if I can do anything." 10

"Well, sir, you're very good; you've a tender heart," said Dolly, going to the door.

Godfrey was too painfully preoccupied to feel a twinge of self-reproach at this undeserved praise. He walked up and down, unconscious that he was plunging ankle deep in snow, unconscious of everything but trembling suspense about what was going on in the cottage, and the effect of each alternative on his future lot. No, not quite unconscious of everything else. Deeper down, and half-smothered by passionate desire and dread, there was the sense that he 20 ought not to be waiting on these alternatives; that he ought to accept the consequences of his deeds, own the miserable wife, and fulfil the claims of the helpless child. But he had not moral courage enough to contemplate that active renunciation of Nancy as possible for him; he had only conscience and heart enough to make him for ever uneasy under the weakness that forbade the renunciation. And at this moment his mind leaped away from all restraint toward the sudden prospect of deliverance from his long bondage.

"Is she dead?" said the voice that predominated over 30 every other within him. "If she is, I may marry Nancy; and then I shall be a good fellow in future, and have no secrets, and the child—shall be taken care of somehow." But across that vision came the other possibility—"She may live, and then it's all up with me."

Godfrey never knew how long it was before the door of the

cottage opened and Mr. Kimble came out. He went forward to meet his uncle, prepared to suppress the agitation he must feel, whatever news he was to hear.

"I waited for you, as I'd come so far," he said, speaking first.

"Pooh ! it was nonsense for you to come out ; why didn't you send one of the men ? There's nothing to be done. She's dead—has been dead for hours, I should say."

"What sort of woman is she ?" said Godfrey, feeling the 10 blood rush to his face.

"A young woman, but emaciated, with long black hair. Some vagrant—quite in rags. She's got a wedding-ring on, however. They must fetch her away to the workhouse to-morrow. Come, come along."

"I want to look at her," said Godfrey. "I think I saw such a woman yesterday. I'll overtake you in a minute or two."

Mr. Kimble went on, and Godfrey turned back to the cottage. He cast only one glance at the dead face on the 20 pillow, which Dolly had smoothed with decent care ; but he remembered that last look at his unhappy, hated wife so well that at the end of sixteen years every line in the worn face was present to him when he told the full story of this night.

He turned immediately towards the hearth, where Silas Marner sat lulling the child. She was perfectly quiet now, but not asleep—only soothed by sweet porridge and warmth into that wide-gazing calm which makes us older human beings, with our inward turmoil, feel a certain awe in the presence of a little child, such as we feel before some quiet 30 majesty or beauty in the earth or sky—before a steady glowing planet, or a full-flowered eglantine, or the bending trees over a silent pathway. The wide-open blue eyes looked up at Godfrey's without any uneasiness or sign of recognition : the child could make no visible audible claim on its father ; and the father felt a strange mixture of feelings—a conflict of regret and joy, that the pulse of that little heart had no

response for the half-jealous yearning in his own, when the blue eyes turned away from him slowly, and fixed themselves on the weaver's queer face, which was bent low down to look at them, while the small hand began to pull Marner's withered cheek with loving disfiguration.

"You'll take the child to the parish to-morrow?" asked Godfrey, speaking as indifferently as he could.

"Who says so?" said Marner sharply. "Will they make me take her?"

"Why, you wouldn't like to keep her, should you—an old 10 bachelor like you?"

"Till anybody shows they've a right to take her away from me," said Marner. "The mother's dead, and I reckon it's got no father; it's a lone thing, and I'm a lone thing. My money's gone—I don't know where; and this is come from I don't know where. I know nothing; I'm partly mazed."

"Poor little thing!" said Godfrey. "Let me give something towards finding it clothes."

He had put his hand in his pocket and found half a guinea, and thrusting it into Silas's hand, he hurried out of the cottage 20 to overtake Mr. Kimble.

"Ah, I see it's not the same woman I saw," he said as he came up. "It's a pretty little child. The old fellow seems to want to keep it: that's strange for a miser like him. But I gave him a trifle to help him out; the parish isn't likely to quarrel with him for the right to keep the child."

Godfrey reappeared in the White Parlour with dry feet, and, since the truth must be told, with a sense of relief and gladness that was too strong for painful thoughts to struggle with. For could he not venture now, whenever opportunity 30 offered, to say the tenderest things to Nancy Lammeter—to promise her and himself that he would always be just what she would desire to see him? There was no danger that his dead wife would be recognized. Those were not days of active inquiry and wide report; and as for the registry of their marriage, that was a long way off, buried in unturned

pages, away from every one's interest but his own. Dunsey might betray him if he came back ; but Dunsey might be won to silence.

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CHAPTER XIII

SILAS MARNER'S determination to keep the " tramp's child " was matter of hardly less surprise and iterated talk in the village than the robbery of his money. That softening of feeling towards him which dated from his misfortune, that merging of suspicion and dislike in a rather contemptuous pity for him as lone and crazy, was now accompanied with
10 a more active sympathy, especially amongst the women. Notable mothers, who knew what it was to keep children " whole and sweet " ; lazy mothers, who knew what it was to be interrupted in folding their arms and scratching their elbows by the mischievous propensities of children just firm on their legs, were equally interested in conjecturing how a lone man would manage with a two-year-old child on his hands, and were equally ready with their suggestions—the notable chiefly telling him what he had better do, and the lazy ones being emphatic in telling him what he would never be
20 able to do.

Among the notable mothers Dolly Winthrop was the one whose neighbourly offices were the most acceptable to Marner, for they were rendered without any show of bustling instruction. Silas had shown her the half-guinea given to him by Godfrey, and had asked her what he should do about getting some clothes for the child.

" Eh, Master Marner," said Dolly, " there's no call to buy, no more nor a pair o' shoes, for I've got the little petticoats as Aaron wore five years ago ; and it's ill spending the money
30 on them baby-clothes, for the child 'ull grow like grass i' May, bless it—that it will."

And the same day Dolly brought her bundle, and displayed to Marner one by one the tiny garments in their due order

of succession, most of them patched and darned, but clean and neat as fresh-sprung herbs. This was the introduction to a great ceremony with soap and water, from which baby came out in new beauty, and sat on Dolly's knee, handling her toes and chuckling and patting her palms together with an air of having made several discoveries about herself, which she communicated by alternate sounds of "gug-gug-gug" and "mammy." The "mammy" was not a cry of need or uncasiness: Baby had been used to utter it without expecting either tender sound or touch to follow.

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"Anybody 'ud think the angels in heaven couldn't be prettier," said Dolly, rubbing the golden curls and kissing them. "And to think of its being covered w' them dirty rags; and the poor mother—froze to death. But there's Them as took care of it and brought it to your door, Master Marner. The door was open, and it walked in over the snow, like as if it had been a little starved robin. Didn't you say the door was open?"

"Yes," said Silas meditatively—"yes; the door was open. The money's gone I don't know where, and this is come from 29 I don't know where."

He had not mentioned to any one his unconsciousness of the child's entrance, shrinking from questions which might lead to the fact he himself suspected—namely, that he had been in one of his trances.

"Ah," said Dolly, with soothing gravity, "it's like the night and the morning, and the sleeping and the waking, and the rain and the harvest—one goes and the other comes, and we know nothing how nor where. We may strive and scrat and fend, but it's little we can do arter all; the big things 30 come and go w' no striving o' our'n—they do, that they do; and I think you're in the right on it to keep the little 'un, Master Marner, seeing as it's been sent to you, though there's folks as thinks different. You'll happen be a bit moithered with it while it's so little; but I'll come, and welcome, and see to it for you. I've a bit o' time to spare most days;

for when one gets up betimes i' the morning, the clock seems to stan' still tow'rt ten, afore it's time to go about the victual. So, as I say, I'll come and see to the child for you, and welcome."

"Thank you . . . kindly," said Silas, hesitating a little. "I'll be glad if you'll tell me things. But," he added uneasily, leaning forward to look at Baby with some jealousy, as she was resting her head backward against Dolly's arm and eyeing him contentedly from a distance—"but I want to
10 do things for it myself, else it may get fond o' somebody else, and not fond o' me. I've been used to fending for myself in the house; I can learn, I can learn."

"Eh, to be sure," said Dolly gently. "I've seen men as are wonderful handy wi' children. The men are awk'ard and contrairy mostly, God help 'em; but when the drink's out of 'em they aren't unsensible, though they're bad for leeching and bandaging—so fiery and impatient. You see this goes first, next the skin," proceeded Dolly, taking up the little shirt and putting it on.

20 "Yes," said Marner docilely, bringing his eyes very close, that they might be initiated in the mysteries; whereupon Baby seized his head with both her small arms and put her lips against his face with purring noises.

"See there," said Dolly, with a woman's tender tact, "she's fondest o' you. She wants to go o' your lap, I'll be bound. Go then, take her, Master Marner; you can put the things on, and then you can say as you've done for her from the first of her coming to you."

Marner took her on his lap, trembling with an emotion
30 mysterious to himself, at something unknown dawning on his life. Thought and feeling were so confused within him that if he had tried to give them utterance he could only have said that the child was come instead of the gold—that the gold had turned into a child. He took the garments from Dolly, and put them on under her teaching—interrupted, of course, by Baby's gymnastics.

"There, then ! why, you take to it quite easy, Master Marner," said Dolly ; " but what shall you do when you're forced to sit in your loom ? For she'll get busier and mischievous every day—she will, bless her. It's lucky as you've got that high hearth i'stead of a grate for that keeps the fire more out of her reach ; but if you've got anything as can be spilt or broke, or as is fit to cut her fingers off, she'll be at it, and it is but right you should know."

Silas meditated a little while in some perplexity. " I'll tie her to the leg o' the loom," he said at last—" tie her with 10 a good long strip o' something."

" Well, mayhap that'll do, as it's a little gell, for they're easier persuaded to sit i' one place nor the lads. I know what the lads are, for I've had four—four I've had, God knows—and if you was to take and tie 'em up they'd make a fighting and a crying as if you was ringing the pigs. But I'll bring you my little chair, and some bits o' red rag and things for her to play wi' ; an' she'll sit and chatter to 'em as if they was alive. Eh, if it wasn't a sin to the lads to wish 'em made different, bless 'em, I should ha' been glad for one of 'em 20 to be a little gell ; and to think as I could ha' taught her to scour, and mend, and the knitting, and everything ! But I can teach 'em this little un, Master Marner, when she gets old enough."

" But she'll be *my* little un," said Marner, rather hastily ; " she'll be nobody else's."

" No, to be sure ; you'll have a right to her, if you're a father to her, and bring her up according. But," added Dolly, coming to a point which she had determined beforehand to touch upon, " you must bring her up like christened folks's 30 children, and take her to church, and let her learn her catechise, as my little Aaron can say off—the ' I believe,' and everything, and ' hurt nobody by word or deed '—as well as if he was the clerk. That's what you must do, Master Marner, if you'd do the right thing by the orphyn child."

Marners pale face flushed suddenly under a new anxiety. His mind was too busy trying to give some definite bearing to Dollys words for him to think of answering her.

“And its my belief,” she went on, “as the poor little creature has never been christened, and its nothing but right as the parson should be spoke to; and if you was noways unwilling, Id talk to Mr. Macey about it this very day. For if the child ever went anyways wrong, and you hadn’t done your part by it, Master Marners—’noculation, 10 and everything to save it from harm—it ’ud be a thorn i’ your bed for ever o’ this side the grave, and I can’t think as it ’ud be easy lying down for anybody when they’d got to another world if they hadn’t done their part by the helpless children as come wi’out their own asking.”

Dolly herself was disposed to be silent for some time now, for she had spoken from the depths of her own simple belief, and was much concerned to know whether her words would produce the desired effect on Silas. He was puzzled and anxious, for Dollys word “christened” conveyed no distinct 20 meaning to him. He had only heard of baptism, and had only seen the baptism of grown-up men and women.

“What is it as you mean by ‘christened’?” he said at last timidly. “Won’t folks be good to her without it?”

“Dear, dear, Master Marners!” said Dolly, with gentle distress and compassion. “Had you never no father nor mother as taught you to say your prayers, and as theres good words and good things to keep us from harm?”

“Yes,” said Silas in a low voice; “I know a deal about that—used to, used to. But your ways are different: my 30 country was a good way off.” He paused a few moments, and then added more decidedly, “But I want to do everything as can be done for the child; and whatever’s right for it i’ this country, and you think ’ull do it good, Ill act according, if you’ll tell me.”

“Well, then, Master Marners,” said Dolly, inwardly rejoiced, “Ill ask Mr. Macey to speak to the parson about it; and

you must fix on a name for it, because it must have a name giv' it when it's christened."

"My mother's name was Hephzibah," said Silas, "and my little sister was named after her."

"Eh, that's a hard name," said Dolly. "I partly think it isn't a christened name."

"It's a Bible name," said Silas, old ideas recurring.

"Then I've no call to speak again' it," said Dolly, rather startled by Silas's knowledge on this head; "but you see I'm no scholar, and I'm slow at catching the words. My 10 husband says I'm allays like as if I was putting the haft for the handle—that's what he says—for h's very sharp, God help him. But it was awk'ard calling your little sister by such a hard name when you'd got nothing big to say, like—wasn't it, Master Marner?"

"We called her Eppie," said Silas.

"Well, if it was noways wrong to shorten the name, it 'ud be a deal handier. And so I'll go now, Master Marner, and I'll speak about the christening afore dark; and I wish you the best o' luck, and it's my belief as it'll come to you if you 20 do what's right by the orphim child. And there's the 'noculation to be seen to; and as to washing its bits o' things, you need look to nobody but me, for I can do 'em wi' one hand when I've got my suds about. Eh, the blessed angel! You'll let me bring my Aaron one o' these days, and he'll show her his little cart as his father's made for him, and the black-and-white pup as he's got a-rearing."

Baby *was* christened, the rector deciding that a double baptism was the lesser risk to incur; and on this occasion Silas, making himself as clean and tidy as he could, appeared 30 for the first time within the church, and shared in the observances held sacred by his neighbours. He was quite unable, by means of anything he heard or saw, to identify the Raveloe religion with his old faith; if he could at any time in his previous life have done so, it must have been by the aid of a strong feeling ready to vibrate with sympathy, rather than

by a comparison of phrases and ideas; and now for long years that feeling had been dormant. He had no distinct idea about the baptism and the churchgoing except that Dolly had said it was for the good of the child; and in this way, as the weeks grew to months, the child created fresh and fresh links between his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk continually into narrower isolation. Unlike the gold which needed nothing, and must be worshipped in close-locked solitude—which was hidden away from the
10 daylight, was deaf to the song of birds, and started to no human tones—Eppie was a creature of endless claims and ever-growing desires, seeking and loving sunshine, and living sounds, and living movements; making trial of everything, with trust in new joy, and stirring the human kindness in all eyes that looked on her. The gold had kept his thoughts in an ever-repeated circle, leading to nothing beyond itself; but Eppie was an object compacted of changes and hopes that forced his thoughts onward and carried them far away from their old eager pacing towards the same blank limit—
20 carried them away to the new things that would come with the coming years, when Eppie would have learned to understand how her father Silas cared for her, and made him look for images of that time in the ties and charities that bound together the families of his neighbours. The gold had asked that he should sit weaving longer and longer, deafened and blinded more and more to all things except the monotony of his loom and the repetition of his web; but Eppie called him away from his weaving, and made him think all its pauses a holiday, reawakening his senses with her fresh life,
30 even to the old winter flies that came crawling forth in the early spring sunshine, and warming him into joy because *she* had joy.

44 And when the sunshine grew strong and lasting, so that the buttercups were thick in the meadows, Silas might be seen in the sunny midday, or in the late afternoon when the shadows were lengthening under the hedgerows, strolling

out with uncovered head to carry Eppie beyond the Stone-pits to where the flowers grew, till they reached some favourite bank where he could sit down ; while Eppie toddled to pluck the flowers, and make remarks to the winged things that murmured happily above the bright petals, calling "Dad-dad's" attention continually by bringing him the flowers. Then she would turn her ear to some sudden bird-note, and Silas learned to please her by making signs of hushed stillness, that they might listen for the note to come again ; so that when it came, she set up her small back and laughed with 10 gurgling triumph. Sitting on the banks in this way, Silas began to look for the once familiar herbs again ; and as the leaves, with their unchanged outline and markings, lay on his palm, there was a sense of crowding remembrances from which he turned away timidly, taking refuge in Eppie's little world, that lay lightly on his enfeebled spirit.

By the time Eppie was three years old, she developed a fine capacity for mischief and for devising ingenious ways of being troublesome, which found much exercise not only for Silas's patience, but for his watchfulness and penetration. 20 Sorely was poor Silas puzzled on such occasions by the incompatible demands of love. Dolly Winthrop told him that punishment was good for Eppie ; and that, as for rearing a child without making it tingle a little in soft and safe places now and then, it was not to be done.

"To be sure, there's another thing you might do, Master Marner," added Dolly meditatively : "you might shut her up once i' the coal-hole. That was what I did wi' Aaron, for I was that silly wi' the youngest lad as I could never bear to smack him. Not as I could find i' my heart to let him 30 stay i' the coal-hole more nor a minute, but it was enough to colly him all over, so as he must be new washed and dressed, and it was as good as a rod to him—that was. But I put it upo' your conscience, Master Marner, as there's one of 'em you must choose—ayther' smacking or the coal-hole—else she'll get so masterful there'll be no holding her."

Silas was impressed with the melancholy truth of this last remark ; but his force of mind failed before the only two penal methods open to him, not only because it was painful to him to hurt Eppie, but because he trembled at a moment's contention with her, lest she should love him the less for it. Let even an affectionate Goliath get himself tied to a small tender thing, dreading to hurt it by pulling, and dreading still more to snap the cord, and which of the two, pray, will be master ? It was clear that Eppie, with her short toddling 10 steps, must lead father Silas a pretty dance on any fine morning when circumstances favoured mischief.

For example, he had wisely chosen a broad strip of linen as a means of fastening her to his loom when he was busy. It made a broad belt round her waist, and was long enough to allow of her reaching the truckle-bed and sitting down on it, but not long enough for her to attempt any dangerous climbing. One bright summer's morning Silas had been more engrossed than usual in "setting up" a new piece of work—an occasion on which his scissors were in requisition. 20 These scissors, owing to an especial warning of Dolly's, had been kept carefully out of Eppie's reach ; but the click of them had had a peculiar attraction for her ear, and watching the results of that click, she had derived the philosophic lesson that the same cause would produce the same effect. Silas had seated himself in his loom, and the noise of weaving had begun. But he had left his scissors on a ledge which Eppie's arm was long enough to reach ; and now, like a small mouse, watching her opportunity, she stole quietly from her corner, secured the scissors, and toddled to the bed again, 30 setting up her back as a mode of concealing the fact. She had a distinct intention as to the use of the scissors ; and having cut the linen strip in a jagged but effectual manner, in two moments she had run out at the open door, where the sunshine was inviting her, while poor Silas believed her to be a better child than usual. It was not until he happened to need his scissors that the terrible fact burst upon him :

Eppie had run out by herself—had perhaps fallen into the Stone-pit. Silas, shaken by the worst fear that could have befallen him, rushed out, calling “Eppie!” and ran eagerly about the unenclosed space, exploring the dry cavities into which she might have fallen, and then gazing with questioning dread at the smooth red surface of the water. The cold drops stood on his brow. How long had she been out? There was one hope—that she had crept through the stile and got into the fields, where he habitually took her to stroll. But the grass was high in the meadow, and there was no descrying 10 her if she were there except by a close search that would be a trespass on Mr. Osgood’s crop. Still, that misdemeanour must be committed; and poor Silas, after peering all round the hedgerows, traversed the grass, beginning with perturbed vision to see Eppie behind every group of red sorrel, and to see her moving always farther off as he approached. The meadow was searched in vain; and he got over the stile into the next field, looking with dying hope towards a small pond which was now reduced to its summer shallowness, so as to leave a wide margin of good adhesive mud. Here, 20 however, sat Eppie, discoursing cheerfully to her own small boot, which she was using as a bucket to convey the water into a deep hoofmark, while her little naked foot was planted comfortably on a cushion of olive-green mud. A red-headed calf was observing her with alarmed doubt through the opposite hedge.

Here was clearly a case of aberration in a christened child which demanded severe treatment; but Silas, overcome with convulsive joy at finding his treasure again, could do nothing but snatch her up and cover her with half-sobbing 30 kisses. It was not until he had carried her home, and had begun to think of the necessary washing, that he recollected the need that he should punish Eppie and “make her remember.” The idea that she might run away again and come to harm gave him unusual resolution, and for the first time he determined to try the coal-hole, a small closet near the hearth.

‘Naughty, naughty Eppie,’ he suddenly began, holding her on his knee, and pointing to her muddy feet and clothes—“naughty to cut with the scissors and run away. Eppie must go into the coal-hole for being naughty. Daddy must put her in the coal-hole”

He half expected that this would be shock enough, and that Eppie would begin to cry. But instead of that she began to shake herself on his knee, as if the proposition opened a pleasing novelty. Seeing that he must proceed to extremities, 10 he put her into the coal-hole and held the door closed, with a trembling sense that he was using a strong measure. For a moment there was silence, but then came a little cry, “Opy, opy !” and Silas let her out again, saying, “Now, Eppie ’ull never be naughty again, else she must go in the coal-hole, a black, naughty place.”

The weaving must stand still a long while this morning, for now Eppie must be washed and have clean clothes on ; but it was to be hoped that this punishment would have a lasting effect, and save time in future—though perhaps it 20 would have been better if Eppie had cried more.

In half an hour she was clean again, and Silas having turned his back to see what he could do with the linen band, threw it down again, with the reflection that Eppie would be good without fastening for the rest of the morning. He turned round again, and was going to place her in her little chair near the loom, when she peeped out at him with black face and hands again, and said, “Eppie in de toal-hole !”

This total failure of the coal-hole discipline shook Silas’s belief in the efficacy of punishment. “She’d take it all for 30 fun,” he observed to Dolly, “if I didn’t hurt her, and that I can’t do, Mrs. Winthrop. If she makes me a bit o’ trouble I can bear it. And she’s got no tricks but what she’ll grow out of.”

“Well, that’s partly true, Master Marner,” said Dolly sympathetically ; “and if you can’t bring your mind to frighten her off touching things, you must do what you can

to keep 'em out of her way. That's what I do wi' the pups as the lads are allays a-rearing. They *will* worry and gnaw, worry and gnaw they will, if it was one's Sunday cap as hung anywhere so as they could drag it. They know no difference, God help 'em ; it's the pushing o' the teeth as sets 'em on, that's what it is."

So Eppie was reared without punishment, the burden of her misdeeds being borne vicariously by father Silas. The stone hut was made a soft nest for her, lined with downy patience ; and also in the world that lay beyond the stone 10 hut she knew nothing of frowns and denials.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of carrying her and his yarn or linen at the same time, Silas took her with him in most of his journeys to the farmhouses, unwilling to leave her behind at Dolly Winthrop's, who was always ready to take care of her ; and little curly-headed Eppie, the weaver's child, became an object of interest at several outlying homesteads, as well as in the village. Hitherto he had been treated very much as if he had been a useful gnome or brownie—a 20 queer and unaccountable creature, who must necessarily be looked at with wondering curiosity and repulsion, and with whom one would be glad to make all greetings and bargains as brief as possible, but who must be dealt with in a propitiatory way, and occasionally have a present of pork or garden stuff to carry home with him, seeing that without him there was no getting the yarn woven. But now Silas met with open smiling faces and cheerful questioning as a person whose satisfactions and difficulties could be understood. Everywhere he must sit a little and talk about the child, and words of interest were always ready for him. " Ah Master 30 Marner, you'll be lucky if she takes the measles soon and easy ! " or, " Why, there isn't many lone men 'ud ha' been wishing to take up with a little un like that. But I reckon the weaving makes you handier than men as do outdoor work ; you're partly as handy as a woman, for weaving comes next to spinning." Elderly masters and mistresses,

seated observantly in large kitchen arm-chairs, shook their heads over the difficulties attendant on rearing children, felt Eppie's round arms and legs, and pronounced them remarkably firm, and told Silas that if she turned out well (which, however, there was no telling) it would be a fine thing for him to have a steady lass to do for him when he got helpless. Servant maidens were fond of carrying her out to look at the hens and chickens, or to see if any cherries could be shaken down in the orchard; and the small boys and girls

10 approached her slowly, with cautious movement and steady gaze, like little dogs face to face with one of their own kind, till attraction had reached the point at which the soft lips were put out for a kiss. No child was afraid of approaching Silas when Eppie was near him—there was no repulsion around him now, either for young or old; for the little child had come to link him once more with the whole world. There was love between him and the child that blent them into one, and there was love between the child and the world—from men and women with parental looks and tones to the red

20 ladybirds and the round pebbles.

PART II.

CHAPTER XIV

It was a bright autumn Sunday, sixteen years after Silas Marner had found his new treasure on the hearth. The bells of the old Raveloe church were ringing the cheerful peal which told that the morning service was ended; and out of the arched doorway in the tower came slowly, retarded by friendly greetings and questions, the richer parishioners who had chosen this bright Sunday morning as eligible for churchgoing. It was the rural fashion of that time for the more important members of the congregation to depart first, while their humbler neighbours waited and looked on, stroking 10 their bent heads or dropping their curtsies to any large ratepayer who turned to notice them.

Foremost among these advancing groups of well-clad people there are some whom we shall recognize, in spite of Time, who has laid his hand on them all. The tall blond man of forty is not much changed in feature from the Godfrey Cass of six-and-twenty. He is only fuller in flesh, and has only lost the indefinable look of youth—a loss which is marked even when the eye is undulled and the wrinkles are not yet come. Perhaps the pretty woman, not much younger than 20 he, who is leaning on his arm, is more changed than her husband. The lovely bloom that used to be always on her cheek now comes but fitfully—with the fresh morning air or with some strong surprise; yet to all who love human faces best for what they tell of human experience, Nancy's beauty has a heightened interest. The firm yet placid mouth,

the clear veracious glance of the brown eyes, speak now of a nature that has been tested and has kept its highest qualities ; and even the costume, with its dainty neatness and purity, has more significance now the coquetries of youth can have nothing to do with it.

But it is impossible to mistake Silas Marner. His large brown eyes seem to have gathered a longer vision, as is the way with eyes that have been shortsighted in early life, and they have a less vague, a more answering gaze ; but in
10 everything else one sees signs of a frame much enfeebled by the lapse of the sixteen years. The weaver's bent shoulders and white hair give him almost the look of advanced age, though he is not more than five-and-fifty ; but there is the freshest blossom of youth close by his side—a blond, dimpled girl of eighteen, who has vainly tried to chastise her curly auburn hair into smoothness under her brown bonnet : the hair ripples as obstinately as a brooklet under the March breeze, and the little ringlets burst away from the restraining comb behind and show themselves below the bonnet-crown.
20 Eppie cannot help being rather vexed about her hair, for there is no other girl in Raveloe who has hair at all like it, and she thinks hair ought to be smooth. She does not like to be blameworthy even in small things : you see how neatly her prayer-book is folded in her spotted handkerchief.

That good-looking young fellow, in a new fustian suit, who walks behind her, is not quite sure upon the question of hair in the abstract, when Eppie puts it to him, and thinks that perhaps straight hair is the best in general, but he doesn't want Eppie's hair to be different. She surely divines that
30 there is some one behind her who is thinking about her very particularly, and mustering courage to come to her side as soon as they are out in the lane, else why should she look rather shy, and take care not to turn away her head from her father Silas, to whom she keeps murmuring little sentences as to who was at church, and who was not at church, and how pretty the red mountain-ash is over the rectory wall ?

"I wish *we* had a little garden, father, with double daisies in, like Mrs. Winthrop's," said Eppie when they were out in the lane; "only they say it 'ud take a deal of digging and bringing fresh soil—and you couldn't do that, could you, father? Anyhow, I shouldn't like you to do it, for it 'ud be too hard work for you."

"Yes, I could do it, child, if you want a bit o' garden. These long evenings I could work at taking in a little bit o' the waste—just enough for a root or two o' flowers for you; and again i' the morning I could have a turn w' the spade 10 before I sat down to the loom. Why didn't you tell me before as you wanted a bit o' garden?"

"I can dig it for you, Master Marner," said the young man in fustian, who was now by Eppie's side entering into the conversation without the trouble of formalities. "It'll be play to me after I've done my day's work, or any odd bits o' time when the work's slack. And I'll bring you some soil from Mr. Cass's garden; he'll let me, and willing."

"Eh, Aaron, my lad, are you there?" said Silas: "I wasn't aware of you; for when Eppie's talking o' things 20 I see nothing but what she's a-saying. Well, if you could help me with the digging, we might get her a bit o' garden all the sooner."

"Then, if you think well and good," said Aaron, "I'll come to the Stone-pits this afternoon, and we'll settle what land's to be taken in, and I'll get up an hour earlier i' the morning, and begin on it."

"But not if you don't promise me not to work at the hard digging, father," said Eppie. "For I shouldn't ha' said anything about it," she added, half bashfully, half roguishly, 30 "only Mrs. Winthrop said as Aaron 'ud be so good, and——"

"And you might ha' known without mother telling you," said Aaron. "And Master Marner knows too, I hope, as I'm able and willing to do a turn o' work for him, and he won't do me the unkindness to anyways take it out o' my hands."

"There, now, father; you won't work in it till it's all

easy," said Eppie, "and you and me can mark out the beds, and make holes and plant the roots. It'll be a deal livelier at the Stone-pits when we've got some flowers, for I always think the flowers can see us and know what we're talking about. And I'll have a bit o' rosemary and bergamot and thyme, because they're so sweet-smelling; but there's no lavender—only in the gentlefolk's gardens, I think."

"That's no reason why you shouldn't have some," said Aaron, "for I can bring you slips of anything; I'm forced
10 to cut no end of 'em when I'm gardening, and throw 'em away mostly. There's a big bed o' lavender at the Red House; the missis is very fond of it."

"Well," said Silas gravely, "so as you don't make free for us, or ask for anything as is worth much at the Red House; for Mr. Cass's been so good to us, and built us up the new end o' the cottage, and given us beds and things, as I couldn't abide to be imposin' for garden-stuff or anything else."

"No, no, there's no imposin'," said Aaron; "there's never a garden in all the parish but what there's endless waste in
20 it for want o' somebody as could use everything up. It's what I think to myself sometimes, as there need nobody run short o' victuals if the land was made the most on, and there was never a morsel but what could find its way to a mouth. It sets one thinking o' that—gardening does. But I must go back now, else mother 'ull be in trouble as I aren't there."

"Bring her with you this afternoon, Aaron," said Eppie; "I shouldn't like to fix about the garden and her not know everything from the first—should *you*, father?"

"Ay, bring her if you can, Aaron," said Silas; "she's sure
30 to have a word to say as'll help us to set things on their right end."

Aaron turned back up the village, while Silas and Eppie went on up the lonely sheltered lane.

"O daddy!" she began, when they were in privacy, clasping and squeezing Silas's arm, and skipping round to give him an energetic kiss. "My little old daddy! I'm so

glad. I don't think I shall want anything else when we've got a little garden ; and I knew Aaron would dig it for us," she went on with roguish triumph—"I knew that very well."

"You're a deep little puss, you are," said Silas, with the mild, passive happiness of love-crowned age in his face ; "but you'll make yourself fine and beholden to Aaron."

"Oh no, I shan't," said Eppie, laughing and tripping ; "he likes it."

"Come, come, let me carry your prayer-book, else you'll be dropping it, jumping i' that way." 10

There was the sound of a sharp bark inside the house as Eppie put the key in the door. It was the sign of an excited welcome that was awaiting them from a knowing brown terrier, who, after dancing at their legs in a hysterical manner, rushed with a worrying noise at a tortoise-shell kitten under the loom, and then rushed back with a sharp bark again, as much as to say, "I have done my duty by this feeble creature, you perceive" ; while the lady-mother of the kitten sat sunning her white bosom in the window, and looked round with a sleepy air of expecting caresses, though she was not 20 going to take any trouble for them.

The presence of this happy animal life was not the only change which had come over the interior of the stone cottage. There was no bed now in the living-room, and the small space was well filled with decent furniture, all bright and clean enough to satisfy Dolly Winthrop's eye. The oaken table and three-cornered oaken chair were hardly what was likely to be seen in so poor a cottage. They had come, with the beds and other things, from the Red House ; for Mr. Godfrey Cass, as every one said in the village, did very kindly 30 by the weaver ; and it was nothing but right a man should be looked on and helped by those who could afford it, when he had brought up an orphan child, and been father and mother to her—and had lost his money, too, so as he had nothing but what he worked for week by week, and when the weaving was going down too—for there was less and less

flax spun—and Master Marner was none so young. Nobody was jealous of the weaver, for he was regarded as an exceptional person, whose claims on neighbourly help were not going to be matched in Raveloe. Any superstition that remained concerning him had taken an entirely new colour ; and Mr. Macey, now a very feeble old man of fourscore and six, never seen except in his chimney-corner or sitting in the sunshine at his doorsill, was of opinion that when a man had done what Silas had done by an orphan child, it was a sign
10 that his money would come to light again, or leastwise that the robber would be made to answer for it—for, as Mr. Macey observed of himself, his faculties were as strong as ever.

Silas sat down now and watched Eppie with a satisfied gaze as she spread the clean cloth, and set on it the potato-pie, warmed up slowly in a safe Sunday fashion, by being put into a dry pot over a slowly-dying fire, as the best substitute for an oven. For Silas would not consent to have a grate and oven added to his conveniences : he loved the old brick hearth as he had loved his brown pot ; and was it not there when
20 he had found Eppie ?

Silas ate his dinner more silently than usual, soon laying down his knite and fork, and watching half abstractedly Eppie's play with Snap and the cat, by which her own dining was made rather a lengthy business. Yet it was a sight that might well arrest wandering thoughts—Eppie, with the rippling radiance of her hair and the whiteness of her rounded chin and throat set off by the dark-blue cotton gown, laughing merrily as the kitten held on with her four claws to one shoulder, like a design for a jug-handle ; while Snap on
30 the right hand and Puss on the other put up their paws towards a morsel which she held out of the reach of both—Snap occasionally desisting in order to remonstrate with the cat by a cogent worrying growl on the greediness and futility of her conduct ; till Eppie relented, caressed them both, and divided the morsel between them.

But at last Eppie, glancing at the clock, checked the play,

and said, "O daddy, you're wanting to go into the sunshine to smoke your pipe. But I must clear away first, so as the house may be tidy when godmother comes. I'll make haste ; I won't be long."

Now that she was grown up, Silas had often been led, in those moments of quiet outpouring which come to people who live together in perfect love, to talk with her of the past, and how and why he had lived a lonely man until she had been sent to him. For it would have been impossible for him to hide from Eppie that she was not his own child ; 10 even if the most delicate reticence on the point could have been expected from Raveloe gossips in her presence, her own questions about her mother could not have been parried as she grew up without that complete shrouding of the past which would have made a painful barrier between their minds. So Eppie had long known how her mother had died on the snowy ground, and how she herself had been found on the hearth by father Silas, who had taken her golden curls for his lost guineas brought back to him. The tender and peculiar love with which Silas had reared her in almost inseparable 20 companionship with himself, aided by the seclusion of their dwelling, had preserved her from the lowering influences of the village talk and habits, and had kept her mind in that freshness which is sometimes falsely supposed to be an invariable attribute of rusticity. Perfect love has a breath of poetry which can exalt the relations of the least-instructed human beings ; and this breath of poetry had surrounded Eppie from the time when she had followed the bright gleam that beckoned her to Silas's hearth ; so that it is not surprising if, in other things besides her delicate prettiness, she was 30 not quite a common village maiden, but had a touch of refinement and fervour which came from no other teaching than that of tenderly nurtured, unvitiated feeling. She was too childish and simple for her imagination to rove into questions about her unknown father ; for a long while it did not even occur to her that she must have had a father ; and

the first time that the idea of her mother having had a husband presented itself to her was when Silas showed her the wedding ring which had been taken from the wasted finger, and had been carefully preserved by him in a little lackered box shaped like a shoe. He delivered this box into Eppie's charge when she had grown up, and she often opened it to look at the ring, but still she thought hardly at all about the father of whom it was the symbol. Had she not a father very close to her, who loved her better than any real fathers in the
10 village seemed to love their daughters? On the contrary, who her mother was, and how she came to die in that forlornness, were questions that often pressed on Eppie's mind. Her knowledge of Mrs. Winthrop, who was her nearest friend next to Silas, made her feel that a mother must be very precious; and she had again and again asked Silas to tell her how her mother looked, whom she was like, and how he had found her against the furze bush, led towards it by the little footsteps and the outstretched arms. The furze bush was there still; and this afternoon, when Eppie came out
20 with Silas into the sunshine, it was the first object that arrested her eyes and thoughts.

"Father," she said, in a tone of gentle gravity, which sometimes came like a sadder, slower cadence across her playfulness, "we shall take the furze bush into the garden; it'll come into the corner, and just against it I'll put snowdrops and crocuses, 'cause Aaron says they won't die out, but 'll always get more and more."

"Ah, child," said Silas, always ready to talk when he had his pipe in his hand, apparently enjoying the pauses more
30 than the puffs, "it wouldn't do to leave out the furze bush; and there's nothing prettier to my thinking when it's yellow with flowers. But it's just come into my head what we're to do for a fence—mayhap Aaron can help us to a thought; but a fence we must have, else the donkeys and things 'ull come and trample everything down. And fencing's hard to be got at, by what I can make out."

"Oh, I'll tell you, daddy," said Eppie, clasping her hands suddenly after a minute's thought. "There's lots o' loose stones about, some of 'em not big, and we might lay 'em atop of one another and make a wall. You and me could carry the smallest, and Aaron 'ud carry the rest—I know he would."

"Eh, my precious un," said Silas, "there isn't enough stones to go all round; and as for you carrying, why, wi' your little arms you couldn't carry a stone no bigger than a turnip. You're dillicate made, my dear," he added, with a tender intonation; "that's what Mrs. Winthrop says. 10

"Oh, I'm stronger than you think, daddy," said Eppie; "and if there wasn't stones enough to go all round, why they'll go part o' the way, and then it'll be easier to get sticks and things for the rest. See here, round the big pit, what a many stones!"

She skipped forward to the pit, meaning to lift one of the stones and exhibit her strength, but she started back in surprise.

"O father, just come and look here," she exclaimed; "come and see how the water's gone down since yesterday. 20 Why, yesterday the pit was ever so full!"

"Well, to be sure," said Silas, coming to her side. "Why, that's the draining they've begun on, since harvest, i' Mr. Osgood's fields, I reckon. The foreman said to me the other day, when I passed by 'em, 'Master Marner,' he said, 'I shouldn't wonder if we lay your bit o' waste as dry as a bone.' It was Mr. Godfrey Cass, he said, had gone into the draining; he'd been taking these fields o' Mr. Osgood."

"How odd it'll seem to have the old pit dried up!" said Eppie, turning away, and stooping to lift rather a large stone. 30 "See, daddy, I can carry this quite well," she said, going along with much energy for a few steps, but presently letting it fall.

"Ah, you're fine and strong, aren't you?" said Silas, while Eppie shook her aching arms and laughed. "Come, come, let us go and sit down on the bank against the stile there, and

have no more lifting. You might hurt yourself, child. You'd need have somebody to work for you, and my arm isn't over strong."

Silas uttered the last sentence slowly, as if it implied more than met the ear; and Eppie, when they sat down on the bank, nestled close to his side, and, taking hold caressingly of the arm that was not over strong, held it on her lap, while Silas puffed again dutifully at the pipe, which occupied his other arm. An ash in the hedgerow behind made a fretted
10 screen from the sun, and threw happy, playful shadows all about them.

"Father," said Eppie very gently, after they had been sitting in silence a little while, "if I was to be married, ought I to be married with my mother's ring?"

Silas gave an almost imperceptible start, though the question fell in with the undercurrent of thought in his own mind, and then said in a subdued tone, "Why, Eppie, have you been a-thinking on it?"

"Only this last week, father," said Eppie ingenuously,
20 "since Aaron talked to me about it."

"And what did he say?" said Silas, still in the same subdued way, as if he were anxious lest he should fall into the slightest tone that was not for Eppie's good.

"He said he should like to be married, because he was a-going in four-and-twenty, and had got a deal of gardening work, now Mr. Mott's given up: and he goes twice a week regular to Mr. Cass's, and once to Mr. Osgood's, and they're going to take him on at the Rectory."

"And who is it as he's wanting to marry?" said Silas,
30 with rather a sad smile.

"Why, me, to be sure, daddy," said Eppie, with dimpling laughter, kissing her father's cheek; "as if he'd want to marry anybody else!"

"And you mean to have him, do you?" said Silas.

"Yes, some time," said Eppie; "I don't know when. Everybody's married some time, Aaron says. But I told him

that wasn't true ; for, I said, look at father—he's never been married."

"No, child," said Silas : "your father was a lone man till you was sent to him."

"But you'll never be lone again, father" said Eppie tenderly. "That was what Aaron said—'I could never think o' taking you away from Master Marnar, Eppie' And I said, 'It 'ud be no use if you did, Aaron.' And he wants us all to live together, so as you needn't work a bit, father, only what's for your own pleasure ; and he'd be as good as a son 10 to you—that was what he said."

"And should you like that, Eppie ?" said Silas, looking at her.

"I shouldn't mind it, father," said Eppie, quite simply. "And I should like things to be so as you needn't work much. But if it wasn't for that, I'd sooner things didn't change ; I'm very happy. I like Aaron to be fond of me, and come and see us often, and behave pretty to you. He always *does* behave pretty to you, doesn't he, father ?"

"Yes, child ; nobody could behave better," said Silas 20 emphatically. "He's his mother's lad."

"But I don't want any change," said Eppie. "I should like to go on a long, long while just as we are. Only Aaron does want a change ; and he made me cry a bit—only a bit—because he said I didn't care for him, for if I cared for him I should want us to be married, as he did."

"Eh, my blessed child," said Silas, laying down his pipe as if it were useless to pretend to smoke any longer, "you're o'er young to be married. We'll ask Mrs. Winthrop—we'll ask Aaron's mother what *she* thinks ; if there's a right thing to 30 do she'll come at it. But there's this to be thought on, Eppie : things *will* change, whether we like it or no ; things won't go on for a long while just as they are and no difference. I shall get older and helplesser, and be a burden on you, belike, if I don't go away from you altogether. Not as I mean you'd think me a burden—I know you wouldn't—but

it 'ud be hard upon you ; and when I look for'ard to that, I like to think as you'd have somebody else besides me—somebody young and strong, as 'll outlast your own life and take care on you to the end." Silas paused, and resting his wrists on his knees, lifted his hands up and down meditatively as he looked on the ground.

"Then would you like me to be married, father ?" said Eppie, with a little trembling in her voice.

"I'll not be the man to say no, Eppie," said Silas emphatically ; "but we'll ask your godmother. She'll wish the right thing by you and her son too."

CHAPTER XV.

WHILE Silas and Eppie were seated on the bank discoursing in the fleckered shade of the ash-tree, Miss Priscilla Lammeter was resisting her sister's arguments that it would be better to take tea at the Red House, and let her father have a long nap, than drive home to the Warrens so soon after dinner. The family party (of four only) were seated round the table in the dark wainscoted parlour, with the Sunday dessert before them of fresh filberts, apples, and pears, duly ornamented with
20 leaves by Nancy's own hand before the bells had rung for church.

A great change has come over the dark wainscoted parlour since we saw it in Godfrey's bachelor days, and under the wifeless reign of the old Squire. Now all is polish, on which no yesterday's dust is ever allowed to rest, from the yard's width of oaken boards round the carpet to the old Squire's gun and whips and walking-sticks ranged on the stag's antlers above the mantel-piece. All other signs of sporting and out-door occupation Nancy has removed to another
30 room ; but she has brought into the Red House the habit of filial reverence, and preserves sacredly in a place of honour these relics of her husband's departed father. The tankards

are on the side-table still, but the bossed silver is undimmed by handling, and there are no dregs to send forth unpleasant suggestions—the only prevailing scent is of the lavender and rose-leaves that fill the vases of Derbyshire spar. All is purity and order in this once dreary room, for fifteen years ago it was entered by a new presiding spirit.

“I shall just take a turn to the fields against the Stone-pits Nancy, and look at the draining,” said Godfrey.

“You’ll be in again by tea-time, dear?”

“Oh yes, I shall be back in an hour.”

10

It was Godfrey’s custom on a Sunday afternoon to do a little contemplative farming in a leisurely walk. Nancy seldom accompanied him; for the women of her generation—unless, like Priscilla, they took to out-door management—were not given to much walking beyond their own house and garden, finding sufficient exercise in domestic duties. So, when Priscilla was not with her, she usually sat with Mant’s Bible before her, and after following the text with her eyes for a little while, she would gradually permit them to wander as her thoughts had already insisted on wandering.

20

There was one main thread of painful experience in Nancy’s married life, and on it hung certain deeply-felt scenes, which were the oftenest revived in retrospect. “A man must have so much on his mind,” is the belief by which a wife often supports a cheerful face under rough answers and unfeeling words. And Nancy’s deepest wounds had all come from the perception that the absence of children from their hearth was dwelt on in her husband’s mind as a privation to which he could not reconcile himself.

Had she really been right in the resistance which had cost 30 her so much pain six years ago, and again four years ago—the resistance to her husband’s wish that they should adopt a child? Adoption was more remote from the ideas and habits of that time than of our own; still Nancy had her opinion of it. To adopt a child because children of your own had been denied you was to try and choose your lot in spite of

Providence. The adopted child, she was convinced, would never turn out well, and would be a curse to those who had wilfully and rebelliously sought what it was clear that, for some high reason, they were better without. When you saw a thing was not meant to be, said Nancy, it was a bounden duty to leave off so much as wishing for it.

“But why should you think the child would turn out ill?” said Godfrey in his remonstrances. “She has thriven as well as child can do with the weaver; and *he* adopted her.”
10 There isn’t such a pretty little girl anywhere else in the parish, or one fitter for the station we could give her. Where can be the likelihood of her being a curse to anybody?”

“Yes, my dear Godfrey,” said Nancy, who was sitting with her hands tightly clasped together, and with yearning, regretful affection in her eyes. “The child may not turn out ill with the weaver. But, then, he didn’t go to seek her, as we should be doing. It will be wrong: I feel sure it will. Don’t you remember what that lady we met at the Royston Baths told us about the child her sister adopted? That
20 was the only adopting I ever heard of—and the child was transported when it was twenty-three. Dear Godfrey, don’t ask me to do what I know is wrong; I should never be happy again. I know it’s very hard for *you*—it’s easier for me—but it’s the will of Providence.”

Godfrey had from the first specified Eppie, then about twelve years old, as a child suitable for them to adopt. It had never occurred to him that Silas would rather part with his life than with Eppie. Surely the weaver would wish the best to the child he had taken so much trouble with, and
30 would be glad that such good fortune should happen to her. She would always be very grateful to him, and he would be well provided for to the end of his life—provided for as the excellent part he had done by the child deserved. Was it not an appropriate thing for people in a higher station to take a charge off the hands of a man in a lower? It seemed an eminently appropriate thing to Godfrey, for reasons that

were known only to himself ; and by a common fallacy he imagined the measure would be easy because he had private motives for desiring it.

It seemed to be impossible that he should ever confess to Nancy the truth about Eppie ; she would never recover from the repulsion the story of his earlier marriage would create, told to her now, after that long concealment. And the child too, he thought, must become an object of repulsion ; the very sight of her would be painful. The shock to Nancy's mingled pride and ignorance of the world's evil might even 10 be too much for her delicate frame. Since he had married her with that secret in his heart, he must keep it there to the last. Whatever else he did, he could not make an irreparable breach between himself and this long-loved wife.

On this Sunday afternoon it was already four years since there had been any allusion to the subject between them, and Nancy supposed that it was for ever buried.

" I wonder if he'll mind it, less or more as he gets older," she thought ; " I'm afraid more. Aged people feel the miss of children. What would father do without Priscilla ? And 20 if I die, Godfrey will be very lonely—not holding together with his brothers much. But I won't be over-anxious, and trying to make things out beforehand ; I must do my best for the present."

With that last thought Nancy roused herself from her reverie and turned her eyes again towards the forsaken page. It had been forsaken longer than she imagined, for she was presently surprised by the appearance of the servant with the tea-things. It was, in fact, a little before the usual time for tea ; but Jane had her reasons. 30

" Is your master come into the yard, Jane ? "

" No, 'm, he isn't," said Jane, with a slight emphasis, of which, however, her mistress took no notice.

" I don't know whether you've seen 'em, 'm," continued Jane, after a pause, " but there's folks making haste all one way afore the front window. I doubt something's happened.

There's niver a man to be seen i' the yard, else I'd send and see. I've been up into the top attic, but there's no seeing anything for trees. I hope nobody's hurt, that's all."

"Oh no, I dare say there's nothing much the matter," said Nancy. "It's perhaps Mr. Snell's bull got out again, as he did before."

"I wish he mayn't gore anybody then, that's all," said Jane, not altogether despising a hypothesis which covered a few imaginary calamities.

- 10 "That girl is always terrifying me," thought Nancy; "I wish Godfrey would come in."

She went to the front window and looked as far as she could see along the road, with an uneasiness which she felt to be childish, for there were now no such signs of excitement as Jane had spoken of, and Godfrey would not be likely to return the village road, but by the fields. She continued to stand, however, looking at the placid churchyard with the long shadows of the gravestones across the bright green hillocks, and at the glowing autumn colours of the Rectory trees beyond.

- 20 Before such calm external beauty the presence of a vague fear is more distinctly felt—like a raven flapping its slow wing across the sunny air. Nancy wished more and more that Godfrey would come in.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME one opened the door at the other end of the room, and Nancy felt that it was her husband. She turned from the window with gladness in her eyes, for the wife's chief dread was stilled.

"Dear, I'm so thankful you're come," she said, going towards him. "I began to get——"

- 30 She paused abruptly, for Godfrey was laying down his hat with trembling hands, and turned towards her with a pale face and a strange unanswering glance, as if he saw her indeed,

but saw her as part of a scene invisible to herself. She laid her hand on his arm, not daring to speak again ; but he left the touch unnoticed, and threw himself into his chair.

Jane was already at the door with the hissing urn. "Tell her to keep away, will you ?" said Godfrey. and when the door was closed again he exerted himself to speak more distinctly.

"Sit down, Nancy—there," he said, pointing to a chair opposite him. "I came back as soon as I could, to hinder anybody's telling you but me. I've had a great shock—10 but I care most about the shock it'll be to you."

"It isn't father and Priscilla ?" said Nancy with quivering lips, clasping her hands together tightly on her lap.

"No, it's nobody living," said Godfrey, unequal to the considerate skill with which he would have wished to make his revelation. "It's Dunstan—my brother Dunstan, that we lost sight of sixteen years ago. We've found him—found his body—his skeleton."

The deep dread Godfrey's look had created in Nancy made her feel these words a relief. She sat in comparative calmness 20 to hear what else he had to tell. He went on —

"The Stone-pit has gone dry suddenly—from the draining, I suppose ; and there he lies—has lain for sixteen years, wedged between two great stones. There's his watch and seals, and there's my gold-handled hunting-whip, with my name on. He took it away, without my knowing, the day he went hunting on Wildfire, the last time he was seen."

Godfrey paused ; it was not so easy to say what came next. "Do you think he drowned himself ?" said Nancy, almost wondering that her husband should be so deeply shaken by 30 what had happened all those years ago to an unloved brother, of whom worse things had been augured.

"No, he fell in," said Godfrey, in a low but distinct voice, as if he felt some deep meaning in the fact. Presently he added, "Dunstan was the man that robbed Silas Marner."

The blood rushed to Nancy's face and neck at this surprise

and shame, for she had been bred up to regard even a distant kinship with crime as a dishonour.

"O Godfrey!" she said with compassion in her tone, for she had immediately reflected that the dishonour must be felt still more keenly by her husband.

"There was the money in the pit," he continued—"all the weaver's money. Everything's been gathered up, and they're taking the skeleton to the Rainbow. But I came back to tell you: there was no hundering it; you must know."

10 He was silent, looking on the ground for two long minutes. Nancy would have said some words of comfort under this disgrace, but she refrained, from an instinctive sense that there was something behind—that Godfrey had something else to tell her. Presently he lifted his eyes to her face, and kept them fixed on her as he said,—

"Everything comes to light, Nancy, sooner or later. When God Almighty wills it, our secrets are found out. I've lived with a secret on my mind, but I'll keep it from you no longer. I wouldn't have you know it by somebody else.
20 and not by me—I wouldn't have you find it out after I'm dead. I'll tell you now. It's been 'I will' and 'I won't' with me all my life—I'll make sure of myself now."

Nancy's utmost dread had returned. The eyes of the husband and wife met with awe in them, as at a crisis which suspended affection.

"Nancy," said Godfrey slowly, "when I married you I hid something from you—something I ought to have told you. That woman Marner found dead in the snow—Eppie's mother—that wretched woman—was my wife: Eppie is my child."

30 He paused, dreading the effect of his confession. But Nancy sat quite still, only that her eyes dropped and ceased to meet his. She was pale and quiet as a meditative statue, clasping her hands on her lap.

"You'll never think the same of me again," said Godfrey after a little while, with some tremor in his voice.

She was silent.

"I oughtn't to have left the child unowned; I oughtn't to have kept it from you. But I couldn't bear to give you up, Nancy. I was led away into marrying her—I suffered for it."

Still Nancy was silent, looking down; and he almost expected that she would presently get up and say she would go to her father's. How could she have any mercy for faults that must seem so black to her, with her simple, severe notions?

But at last she lifted up her eyes to his again and spoke. There was no indignation in her voice—only deep regret. 10

"Godfrey, if you had but told me this six years ago, we could have done some of our duty by the child. Do you think I'd have refused to take her in if I'd known she was yours?"

At that moment Godfrey felt all the bitterness of an error that was not simply futile, but had defeated its own end. He had not measured this wife with whom he had lived so long. But she spoke again, with more agitation.

"And—O Godfrey—if we'd had her from the first, if you'd taken to her as you ought, she'd have loved me for her mother—and you'd have been happier with me. I could better 20 have bore my little baby dying, and our life might have been more like what we used to think it 'ud be."

The tears fell, and Nancy ceased to speak.

"But you wouldn't have married me, then, Nancy, if I'd told you," said Godfrey, urged in the bitterness of his self-reproach to prove to himself that his conduct had not been utter folly. "You may think you would now, but you wouldn't then. With your pride and your father's, you'd have hated having anything to do with me after the talk there'd have been." 30

"I can't say what I should have done about that, Godfrey. I should never have married anybody else. But I wasn't worth doing wrong for—nothing is in this world. Nothing is so good as it seems beforehand—not even our marrying wasn't, you see." There was a faint, sad smile on Nancy's face as she said the last words.

"I'm a worse man than you thought I was, Nancy," said Godfrey rather tremulously. "Can you forgive me ever?"

"The wrong to me is but little, Godfrey; you've made it up to me—you've been good to me for fifteen years. It's another you did the wrong to; and I doubt it can never be all made up for."

"But we can take Eppie now," said Godfrey. "I won't mind the world knowing at last. I'll be plain and open for
10 the rest o' my life."

"It'll be different coming to us, now she's grown up," said Nancy, shaking her head sadly. "But it's your duty to acknowledge her and provide for her; and I'll do my part by her, and pray to God Almighty to make her love me."

"Then we'll go together to Silas Marner's this very night, as soon as everything's quiet at the Stone-pits."

CHAPTER XVII

BETWEEN eight and nine o'clock that evening Eppie and Silas were seated alone in the cottage. After the great excitement the weaver had undergone from the events of
20 the afternoon, he had felt a longing for this quietude, and had even begged Mrs. Winthrop and Aaron, who had naturally lingered behind every one else, to leave him alone with his child.

Silas's face showed a sort of transfiguration as he sat in his armchair and looked at Eppie. She had drawn her own chair towards his knees, and leaned forward, holding both his hands, while she looked up at him. On the table near them, lit by a candle, lay the recovered gold—the old long-loved gold, ranged in orderly heaps, as Silas used to range it
30 in the days when it was his only joy. He had been telling her how he used to count it every night, and how his soul was utterly desolate till she was sent to him.

"At first I'd a sort o' feeling come across me now and then," he was saying in a subdued tone, "as if you might be changed into the gold again; for sometimes, turn my head which way I would, I seemed to see the gold; and I thought I should be glad if I could feel it, and find it was come back. But that didn't last long. After a bit I should have thought it was a curse come again if it had drove you from me, for I'd got to feel the need o' your looks and your voice and the touch o' your little fingers. You didn't know then, Eppie, when you were such a little un—you didn't know what your old father Silas felt for you."

"But I know now, father," said Eppie. "If it hadn't been for you, they'd have taken me to the workhouse, and there'd have been nobody to love me."

"Eh, my precious child, the blessing was mine. If you hadn't been sent to save me, I should ha' gone to the grave in my misery. The money was taken away from me in time; and you see it's been kept—kept till it was wanted for you. It's wonderful—our life is wonderful."

Silas sat in silence a few minutes, looking at the money. 20
"It takes no hold of me now," he said ponderingly—"the money doesn't. I wonder if it ever could again—I doubt it might if I lost you, Eppie. I might come to think I was forsaken again, and lose the feeling that God was good to me."

At that moment there was a knocking at the door; and Eppie was obliged to rise without answering Silas. Beautiful she looked, with the tenderness of gathering tears in her eyes and a slight flush on her cheeks as she stepped to open the door. The flush deepened when she saw Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey 30
Cass. She made her little rustic curtsy, and held the door wide for them to enter.

"We're disturbing you very late, my dear," said Mrs. Cass, taking Eppie's hand and looking in her face with an expression of anxious interest and admiration. Nancy herself was pale and tremulous.

Eppie, after placing chairs for Mr. and Mrs. Cass, went to stand against Silas, opposite to them.

"Well, Marner," said Godfrey, trying to speak with perfect firmness, "it's a great comfort to me to see you with your money again, that you've been deprived of so many years. It was one of my family did you the wrong—the more grief to me—and I feel bound to make up to you for it in every way. Whatever I can do for you will be nothing but paying a debt even if I looked no further than the robbery. But there are
10 other things I'm beholden—shall be beholden to you for Marner."

Godfrey checked himself. It had been agreed between him and his wife that the subject of his fatherhood should be approached very carefully, and that, if possible, the disclosure should be reserved for the future, so that it might be made to Eppie gradually. Nancy had urged this, because she felt strongly the painful light in which Eppie must inevitably see the relation between her father and mother.

Silas, always ill at ease when he was being spoken to by
20 "betters," such as Mr. Cass—tall, powerful, florid men, seen chiefly on horseback—answered with some constraint,—

"Sir, I've a deal to thank you for a'ready. As for the robbery, I count it no loss to me. And if I did, you couldn't help it; you aren't answerable for it."

"You may look at it in that way, Marner, but I never can and I hope you'll let me act according to my own feel of what's just. I know you're easily contented; you've been a hard-working man all your life."

"Yes, sir, yes," said Marner meditatively. "I should
30 been bad off without my work; it was what I held by . . . everything else was gone from me."

"Ah," said Godfrey, applying Marner's words simply to his bodily wants, "it was a good trade for you in this country, because there's been a great deal of linen-weaving to be done. But you're getting rather past such close work, Marner; it's time you laid by and had some rest. You look

a good deal pulled down, though you're not an old man, are you ? ”

“ Fifty-five, as near as I can say, sir,” said Silas.

“ Oh, why, you may live thirty years longer—look at old Macey! And that money on the table, after all, is but little. It won't go far either way—whether it's put out to interest, or you were to live on it as long as it would last ; it wouldn't go far if you'd nobody to keep but yourself, and you've had two to keep for a good many years now.”

“ Eh, sir,” said Silas, unaffected by anything Godfrey was 10 saying, “ I'm in no fear o' want. We shall do very well—Eppie and me 'ull do well enough. There's few working-folks have got so much laid by as that. I don't know what it is to gentlefolks, but I look upon it as a deal—a most too much. And as for us, it's little we want.”

“ Only the garden, father,” said Eppie, blushing up to the ears the moment after.

“ You love a garden, do you, my dear ” said Nancy, thinking that this turn in the point of view might help her husband. “ We should agree in that ; I give a deal of time 20 to the garden.”

“ Ah, there's plenty of gardening at the Red House,” said Godfrey, surprised at the difficulty he found in approaching a proposition which had seemed so easy to him in the distance.

“ You've done a good part by Eppie, Marner, for sixteen 30 years. It 'ud be a great comfort to you to see her well provided for, wouldn't it ? She looks blooming and healthy, she it not fit for any hardships ; she doesn't look like a strapping

come of working parents. You'd like to see her taken care of by those who can leave her well off, and make a lady 30 of her ; she's more fit for it than for a rough life, such as she might come to have in a few years' time.”

A slight flush came over Marner's face, and disappeared, like a passing gleam. Eppie was simply wondering Mr. Cass should talk so about things that seemed to have nothing to do with reality, but Silas was hurt and uneasy.

"I don't take your meaning, sir," he answered, not having the words at command to express the mingled feelings with which he had heard Mr. Cass's words.

"Well, my meaning is this, Marner," said Godfrey, determined to come to the point. "Mrs. Cass and I, you know, have no children—nobody to be the better for our good home and everything else we have—more than enough for ourselves. And we should like to have somebody in the place of a daughter to us—we should like to have Eppie, and
10 treat her in every way as our own child. It 'ud be a great comfort to you in your old age, I hope, to see her fortune made in that way, after you've been at the trouble of bringing her up so well. And it's right you should have every reward for that. And Eppie, I'm sure, will always love you and be grateful to you; she'd come and see you very often, and we should all be on the look-out to do everything we could towards making you comfortable."

While Godfrey Cass had been speaking, Eppie had quietly passed her arm behind Silas's head, and let her hand rest
20 against it caressingly; she felt him trembling violently. He was silent for some moments when Mr. Cass had ended—powerless under the conflict of emotions, all alike painful. Eppie's heart was swelling at the sense that her father was in distress; and she was just going to lean down and speak to him, when one struggling dread at last gained the mastery over every other in Silas, and he said faintly,—

"Eppie, my child, speak. I won't stand in your way. Thank Mr. and Mrs. Cass."

Eppie took her hand from her father's head, and came
30 forward a step. Her cheeks were flushed, but not with shyness this time; the sense that her father was in doubt and suffering banished that sort of self-consciousness. She dropped a low curtsy, first to Mrs. Cass and then to Mr. Cass, and said,—

"Thank you, ma'am—thank you, sir. But I can't leave my father, nor own anybody nearer than him. And I don't

want to be a lady—thank you all the same” (here Eppie dropped another curtsy). “I couldn’t give up the folks I’ve been used to.”

Eppie’s lip began to tremble a little at the last words. She retreated to her father’s chair again, and held him round the neck; while Silas, with a subdued sob, put up his hand to grasp hers.

The tears were in Nancy’s eyes, but her sympathy with Eppie was naturally divided with distress on her husband’s account. She dared not speak, wondering what was going on in her husband’s mind.

Godfrey felt an irritation inevitable to almost all of us when we encounter an unexpected obstacle. The agitation with which he spoke again was not quite unmixed with anger.

“But I’ve a claim on you, Eppie—the strongest of all claims. It’s my duty, Marner, to own Eppie as my child, and provide for her. She’s my own child; her mother was my wife. I’ve a natural claim on her that must stand before every other.”

Eppie had given a violent start, and turned quite pale. 20 Silas, on the contrary, who had been relieved by Eppie’s answer from the dread lest his mind should be in opposition to hers, felt the spirit of resistance in him set free, not without a touch of parental fierceness. “Then, sir,” he answered with an accent of bitterness that had been silent in him since the memorable day when his youthful hope had perished—“then, sir, why didn’t you say so sixteen year ago, and claim her before I’d come to love her, i’stead o’ coming to take her from me now, when you might as well take the heart out o’ my body? God gave her to me because you turned your 30 back upon her, and He looks upon her as mine. You’ve no right to her! When a man turns a blessing from his door, it falls to them as take it in.”

“I know that, Marner. I was wrong. I’ve repented of my conduct in that matter,” said Godfrey, who could not help feeling the edge of Silas’s words.

"I'm glad to hear it, sir," said Marner with gathering excitement; "but repentance doesn't alter what's been going on for sixteen year. Your coming now and saying 'I'm her father' doesn't alter the feelings inside us. It's me she's been calling her father ever since she could say the word."

"But I think you might look at the thing more reasonably, Marner," said Godfrey, unexpectedly awed by the weaver's direct truth-speaking. "It isn't as if she was to be taken
10 quite away from you, so that you'd never see her again. She'll be very near you, and come to see you very often. She'll feel just the same towards you."

"Just the same?" said Marner, more bitterly than ever. "How'll she feel just the same for me as she does now, when we eat o' the same bit and drink o' the same cup, and think o' the same things from one day's end to another? Just the same? That's idle talk. You'd cut us i' two."

Godfrey felt rather angry again. It seemed to him that the weaver was very selfish to oppose what was undoubtedly
20 for Eppie's welfare; and he felt himself called upon, for her sake, to assert his authority.

"I should have thought, Marner," he said severely—"I should have thought your affection for Eppie would make you rejoice in what was for her good, even if it did call upon you to give up something. You ought to remember your own life's uncertain, and she's at an age now when her lot may soon be fixed in a way very different from what it would be in her father's home—she may marry some low working-man, and then, whatever I might do for her, I couldn't make
30 her well-off. You're putting yourself in the way of her welfare; and though I'm sorry to hurt you after what you've done, and what I've left undone, I feel now it's my duty to insist on taking care of my own daughter. I want to do my duty."

It would be difficult to say whether it were Silas or Eppie that was more deeply stirred by this last speech of Godfrey's.

Thought had been very busy in Eppie as she listened to the contest between her old, long-loved father and this new, unfamiliar father who had suddenly come to fill the place of that black, featureless shadow which had held the ring and placed it on her mother's finger.

Silas, on the other hand, was again stricken in conscience, and alarmed lest Godfrey's accusation should be true—lest he should be raising his own will as an obstacle to Eppie's good. For many moments he was mute, struggling for the self-conquest necessary to the uttering of the difficult words. 10 They came out tremulously.

"I'll say no more. Let it be as you will. Speak to the child. I'll hinder nothing."

Even Nancy, with all the acute sensibility of her own affections, shared her husband's view that Marner was not justifiable in his wish to retain Eppie after her real father had avowed himself. To her mind, Eppie, in being restored to her birthright, was entering on a too long withheld but unquestionable good. Hence she heard Silas's last words with relief, and thought, as Godfrey did, that their wish was 20 achieved.

"Eppie, my dear," said Godfrey—looking at his daughter not without some embarrassment under the sense that she was old enough to judge him—"it'll always be our wish that you should show your love and gratitude to one who's been a father to you so many years, and we shall want to help you to make him comfortable in every way. But we hope you'll come to love us as well; and though I haven't been what a father should ha' been to you all these years, I wish to do the utmost in my power for you for the rest of my life, and 30 provide for you as my only child. And you'll have the best of mothers in my wife—that'll be a blessing you haven't known since you were old enough to know it."

"My dear, you'll be a treasure to me," said Nancy in her gentle voice. "We shall want for nothing when we have our daughter."

Eppie did not come forward and curtsy as she had done before. She held Silas's hand in hers, and grasped it firmly—it was a weaver's hand, with a palm and finger-tips that were sensitive to such pressure—while she spoke with colder decision than before.

“Thank you, ma'am—thank you, sir, for your offers—they're very great, and far above my wish. For I should have no delight i' life any more if I was forced to go away from my father, and knew he was sitting at home, a-thinking of
10 me and feeling lone. We've been used to be happy together every day, and I can't think o' no happiness without him. And he says he'd nobody i' the world till I was sent to him, and he'd have nothing when I was gone. And he's took care of me and loved me from the first, and I'll cleave to him as long as he lives, and nobody shall ever come between him and me.”

“But you must make sure, Eppie,” said Silas in a low voice—“you must make sure as you won't ever be sorry, because you've made your choice to stay among poor folks,
20 and with poor clothes and things, when you might ha' had everything o' the best.”

His sensitiveness on this point had increased as he listened to Eppie's words of faithful affection.

“I can never be sorry, father,” said Eppie. “I shouldn't know what to think on or to wish for with fine things about me, as I haven't been used to. And it 'ud be poor work for me to put on things, and ride in a gig, and sit in a place at church, as u'd make them as I'm fond of think me unfitting company for 'em. What could I care for then?”

30 Nancy looked at Godfrey with a pained, questioning glance. But his eyes were fixed on the floor, where he was moving the end of his stick, as if he were pondering on something absently. She thought there was a word which might perhaps come better from her lips than from his.”

“What you say is natural, my dear child; it's natural you should cling to those who've brought you up,” she said

mildly; "but there's a duty you owe to your lawful father. There's perhaps something to be given up on more sides than one. When your father opens his home to you, I think it's right you shouldn't turn your back on it."

"I can't feel as I've got any father but one," said Eppie impetuously, while the tears gathered "I've always thought of a little home where he'd sit i' the corner, and I should fend and do everything for him. I can't think o' no other home. I wasn't brought up to be a lady, and I can't turn my mind to it. I like the working-folks and their 10 victuals and their ways. And," she ended passionately, while the tears fell, "I'm promised to marry a working-man, as 'll live with father, and help me to take care of him."

Godfrey looked up at Nancy with a flushed face and smarting, dilated eyes. This frustration of a purpose towards which he had set out under the exalted consciousness that he was about to compensate in some degree for the greatest demerit of his life made him feel the air of the room stifling.

"Let us go," he said in an undertone.

"We won't talk of this any longer now," said Nancy, 20 rising. "We're your well-wishers, my dear—and yours too, Marnie. We shall come and see you again. It's getting late now."

In this way she covered her husband's abrupt departure, for Godfrey had gone straight to the door, unable to say more.

CHAPTER XVIII

NANCY and Godfrey walked home under the starlight in silence. When they entered the oaken parlour Godfrey threw himself into his chair, while Nancy laid down her bonnet and shawl and stood on the hearth near her husband, unwilling to leave him even for a few minutes, and yet fearing to utter 30 any word lest it might jar on his feeling. At last Godfrey turned his head towards her, and their eyes met, dwelling

in that meeting without any movement on either side. That quiet mutual gaze of a trusting husband and wife is like the first moment of rest or refuge from a great weariness or a great danger—not to be interfered with by speech or action which would distract the sensations from the fresh enjoyment of repose.

But presently he put out his hand, and as Nancy placed hers within it he drew her towards him, and said,—

“That’s ended !”

- 10 She bent to kiss him, and then said as she stood by his side, “Yes, I’m afraid we must give up the hope of having her for a daughter. It wouldn’t be right to want to force her to come to us against her will. We can’t alter her bringing up and what’s come of it.”

- “No,” said Godfrey, with a keen decisiveness of tone, in contrast with his usually careless and unemphatic speech ; “there’s debts we can’t pay like money debts, by paying extra for the years that have slipped by. While I’ve been putting off and putting off, the trees have been growing :
20 it’s too late now. Marner was in the right in what he said about a man’s turning away a blessing from his door : it falls to somebody else. I wanted to pass for childless once, Nancy ; I shall pass for childless now against my wish.”

CONCLUSION

- THERE was one time of the year which was held in Raveloe to be especially suitable for a wedding. It was when the great lilacs and laburnums in the old-fashioned gardens showed their golden and purple wealth above the lichen-tinted walls, and when there were calves still young enough to want bucketfuls of fragrant milk. People were not so busy then
30 as they must become when the full cheesemaking and the mowing had set in ; and besides, it was a time when a light bridal dress could be worn with comfort and seen to advantage.

Happily the sunshine fell more warmly than usual on the lilac tufts the morning that Eppie was married, for her dress was a very light one. She had often thought, though with a feeling of renunciation, that the perfection of a wedding dress would be a white cotton, with the tiniest pink sprig at wide intervals ; so that when Mrs. Godfrey Cass begged to provide one, and asked Eppie to choose what it should be, previous meditation had enabled her to give a decided answer at once.

Seen at a little distance as she walked across the churchyard 10 and down the village, she seemed to be attired in pure white, and her hair looked like the dash of gold on a lily. One hand was on her husband's arm, and with the other she clasped the hand of her father Silas.

"You won't be giving me away, father," she had said before they went to church ; "you'll only be taking Aaron to be a son to you."

Dolly Winthrop walked behind with her husband ; and there ended the little bridal procession.

In the open yard before the Rainbow the party of guests 20 were already assembled, though it was still nearly an hour before the appointed feast-time. But by this means they could not only enjoy the slow advent of their pleasure ; they had also ample leisure to talk of Silas Marner's strange history, and arrive by due degrees at the conclusion that he had brought a blessing on himself by acting like a father to a lone, motherless child.

As the bridal group approached, a hearty cheer was raised in the Rainbow yard ; and Ben Winthrop, whose jokes had retained their acceptable flavour, found it agreeable to turn 30 in there and receive congratulations, not requiring the proposed interval of quiet at the Stone-pits before joining the company.

Eppie had a larger garden than she had ever expected there now ; and in other ways there had been alterations at the expense of Mr. Cass, the landlord, to suit Silas's larger family. For he and Eppie had declared that they would rather stay

at the Stone-pits than go to any new home. The garden was fenced with stones on two sides, but in front there was an open fence, through which the flowers shone with answering gladness as the four united people came within sight of them.

“ O father,” said Eppie, “ what a pretty home ours is ! I think nobody could be happier than we are.”

NOTES

CHAPTER I. "In the early years of the period 1815-1851, in spite of the fact that the power-loom had come into use, the hand-loom held its ground and seemed likely to do so indefinitely. . . . The hand-loom industry was carried on essentially in the homes of the weavers, providing employment for their wives and children without confining them within a factory, and it could be carried on in conjunction with agriculture. There was no need for the workers to gather into towns and it was possible to carry on the trade under the most healthy and wholesome conditions. With the extension of power-loom weaving all this was changed. It was impossible to work profitably without collecting a large number of looms into one building and gradually the cottage industry was replaced by the factory system." . . . The linen trade progressed far less rapidly than the cotton trade, because the production of raw material is much more expensive and much more variable in quantity, quality and price. . . . There is also much greater difficulty in working the hard inelastic linen yarn in the power-loom and more trouble met with in spinning than in the case of cotton. . . . "In 1815 all the yarns employed in the manufacture of anything but the coarsest fabrics were hand-spun" (*Social England*)

Read also two chapters in the "Piers Plowman" history series (Books IV. and V.), which give a full account of the nature of the weaver's work.

Raveloe was a village . . . etc. George Eliot's introductory chapter to *Felix Holt* gives a full description of this part of rural England as she remembered it about thirty years before *Silas Marner* was written.

CHAPTER II. **his native town . . . north'ard:** one of the northern towns where the power-loom was already coming into use and changing the whole character of the weaving industry. A large factory was eventually built upon the site of Lantern Yard.

CHAPTER III. **he's threatening to distrain for it:** the action of distraining or distraint is the right which a landlord has of seizing the personal chattels of his tenant for the non-payment of rent.

CHAPTER IX. **pigs' pettitoes** : feet of pigs prepared for food ; corruption of French 'petons,' little feet. "Pigs' trotters," as we say nowadays.

CHAPTER X. **pillion** : "cushion attached to hinder part of saddle for second rider, usually a woman" (*Oxford Concise Dict.*).

joseph : probably in allusion to Joseph's coat of many colours—a garment made like a man's great-coat, usually with a broad cape, and buttoning down the front. It was worn in the eighteenth century, and later, by women when riding on horseback. "Olivia would be drawn as an Amazon dressed in a green joseph richly laced with gold and a whip in her hand" (Goldsmith, *Vicar of Wakefield*).

her hands bore the traces of butter-making. George Eliot herself is said to have had "large, finely-shaped, feminine hands—one of them broader across than the other,"—a peculiarity due to the amount of butter and cheese made during her housekeeping days at Griff (1837-1841).

pert : a dialect form of 'pert,' in the sense of 'lively and cheerful.'

CHAPTER XI. **Catalepsy** : a state of more or less complete insensibility with absence of power of voluntary motion. A cataleptic attack may last a few minutes, or a much longer period, during which time the limbs and body assume a statue-like fixedness. It is sometimes preceded by disappointment, fear, or even strong religious emotion, being in such cases only an extreme form of what is otherwise called "trance."

CHAPTER XIV. **fustian** : a name given to a variety of heavy woven cotton fabrics, chiefly prepared for men's wear. "Cor-duroy" is a kind of fustian. The term was once applied to a particular kind of coarse cloth made of cotton and flax.

QUESTIONS

1. In what part of the country does George Eliot lay the scene of this book? Write a description of Raveloe as a country village.

2. How did the lives of the Raveloe people differ from those of Lantern Yard? How did the change of surroundings affect the linen-weaver?

3. What do you gather from this book about the progress of the weaving industry during the life of Silas Marner? How would the introduction of machinery affect such a man?

4. "He seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse and without reflection." What does this mean? What light do these words throw upon the effect the work was having upon Silas Marner's life and outlook?

5. What evidence can you find of lovable traits in Silas Marner's character before he was robbed of his money?

6. What have you learnt from this book about the use and purpose of money?

7. "The little child had come to link him once more with the whole world." Describe carefully the stages by which Eppie did this.

8. Compare and contrast the influence of the child with that of the gold upon the life of Silas Marner.

9. Read the conclusion of Chapter IX. from "Godfrey Cass was looking forward to this New Year's Eve." . . . What inferences do you draw from this passage concerning the character of Godfrey Cass? Quote from other parts of the story in support of what you say.

10. Make a list of all the characters introduced into this story. Arrange them in groups, marking the chief character in each group. Then show the links by which the different groups are connected and drawn together.

11. If you have read *The Old Curiosity Shop*, write a comparison of this with *Silas Marner*. Say which story you prefer, and give your reasons.

SUBJECTS FOR SHORT COMPOSITIONS

1. Describe an imaginary visit to Raveloe in the twentieth century (What changes would you expect to find there?)
2. For a dialogue : A Conversation at the Rambow Inn
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